

OLD SIR DOUGLAS.



OLD SIR DOUGLAS

BY

THE HON. MRS. NORTON

AUTHOR OF "LOST AND SAVED," &c. &c.

Slander is shipwreck by a dry tempest.'

Herbert's 'Jacula Prudentum.'

'The winds of change afflict us. What to-day

We tether tight, to-morrow whirls away.'

Hon. Robert Lytton.

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD DUFFERIN AND CLANDEBOYE.

MY DEAR DUFFERIN,

This Book was to have been dedicated to your Mother ; and it is a melancholy pleasure to me to remember that she read and warmly praised some of it, during her last illness, while the story was as yet incomplete.

Death has broken that unequalled companionship. The steady affection ; the indulgent appreciation ; the quick sympathy ; the clear judgment ; the womanly tenderness ; the playful, kindly wit ; the social charm ;—all those lovely and lovable qualities which surely never were before so perfectly combined with a rare and lofty intelligence, have vanished from amongst us, for ever.

There remains,—for you above all, but for me also, and in their measure and degree for all who ever lived in intimacy with her,—a great sorrowful blank, which nothing can suffice to fill ; let the remaining years of life bring what they may !

I have seen more serious compositions than this present attempt of mine, inscribed, under such circumstances, ‘to the memory’

of the loved and lost. I will not so deal with a work of fiction ; but rather ask you, for her sake, to accept this dedication in her stead.

I can fearlessly offer my attempt at a picture of youthful error in my wild rebellious Kenneth, and of base and blame-worthy conduct in others of my story,—to you, whose whole career, from boyhood to the final hour of farewell, was one uninterrupted source of pride and satisfaction to her, and to all who belong to you.

Forgive the saying so much (since I fain would say even more) in a letter which is set here for all to read who will ; though it is inscribed only with your name.

And believe me, now and always,

Your affectionate Aunt,

CAROLINE NORTON.

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OLD SIR DOUGLAS.

CHAPTER I.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

THERE is no example of human beauty more perfectly picturesque than a very handsome man of middle age.

No, smiling reader, not even a very handsome young man: not even that same man in his youth. The gain is in expression, of which every age has its own; and perhaps there is more change in that than in the features, under the working hand of Time. When luckless Dr. Donne wrote to the proud mother of the famous George Herbert of Bemerton and Lord Herbert of Cherbury—

‘Nor spring nor summer beauty hath the grace
That I have seen in an autumnal face,’

it is to be feared he was more complimentary than veracious; for bloom is an integral part of woman’s loveliness, and every day that brings her nearer to its withering takes away something of her charm. But with the other sex it is different. The youth who is noble-looking, glad, eager, gallant and gay as the young Lochinvar, will yet be handsomer when time shall have given him that air of customary command, of mingled majesty, wisdom, and cordial benevolence, which belongs to a later date; and which, in fine natures, results from much mingling with the joys, sorrows, and destinies of other men, with an increased instead of a diminished sympathy in all that concerns them.

Often, too, this is accompanied by a genial cheerfulness of manner, springing from the same source. At the age of which I am speaking, small annoyances have ceased to afflict: great hopes and fears are subject to a more noble reserve: the passionate selfishness of inexperience has vanished: the restlessness of learning how much or how little life can achieve is calmed down. The smile of welcome in such a man’s countenance is worth all the beauty of his adolescent years.

And if there should be any of my readers who, in spite of this argument, refuse to become converts to such unusual doctrine, and obstinately adhere to a contrary opinion,—that is because they never saw SIR DOUGLAS ROSS OF GLENROSSIE, familiarly called by his tenantry and his few remaining family ties, ‘Old Sir Douglas.’

He had indeed been called by that name before he could reasonably be said to have earned it: before his dark and thickly-curled hair had shown any of those rare silver threads which the American poet, Longfellow, beautifully imagines as the

‘Dawn of another life—that breaks o’er the earthly horizon,
As in the Eastern sky the first faint streaks of the morning.’

He was called Old Sir Douglas, chiefly, as it seemed, because everybody else was so young. His father had run away with a beautiful and penniless Miss Macrae, when he was scarcely twenty. At five-and-twenty he was a widower with two infant sons; and by way of at once satisfying his family, redeeming the past, and giving a second mother to those young children, he wedded with the heiress of Toulmains; a very stiff and starched successor to the blooming and passionate girl whom he had laid in her grave so early that his union with her grew to be a vague dream rather than a distinct memory.

But the sunshine was off the path of his life for ever: and perhaps that instinct of insufficiency to another’s happiness, which haunts the hearts of those who live in intimacy together, even when those hearts are not very tender, crept into the hard shell where beat a sort of cold fish-life, in the bosom of the second Lady Ross, and soured still further a nature never genial. Hateful to her was the memory of that first wife; displeasing to the last degree the sight of her orphan children and the sound of their prattle. She spent her time in steady efforts at repression, and in a series of inventive punishments, principally directed against the sin of liveliness.

She did not relax in her system even after she herself became a mother; and the little pale shrewd sharp-browed half-sister she gave the boys, seemed indeed to have been modelled on her own pattern. Still, resolute, and reserved; that tiny girl foreshadowed the woman to be, and faithfully transmitted the soul and spirit of her progenitrix.

Young as the first brood were when they lost their loving mother, they felt the change. Home was home still, but it was home *frappé à la glace*; and the efforts of Lady Ross to train and nail them as snow-berries not only failed, but produced, as years went

on, a sort of chronic state of rebellion ; insomuch that, even had her wishes been reasonable and gently expressed (two conditions that never existed), I fear she would have found the two boys, Douglas and Kenneth, wilfully provided with a stock of ready-made opposition.

In a household where the sole break in the monotony of discontent was a change from storms to sullenness on the part of the governing authority, and a corresponding change from passion to dejection in the young things that were to be governed, it was not to be expected that nature should be properly disciplined, or minds effectually taught. The boys learned as little as they could, and resisted as much as they dared. Their affection for each other was proportionate to their isolation at home, and before they were severally nine and ten years old, their chief pleasure was to roam over the hills behind the castle, their arms twined round each other's necks, talking of the insupportable tyranny of stepmothers, as set forth in all the stories they had ever read, and planning wild and boyish attempts at escapes from such thralldom.

From their father they received neither instruction nor guidance. Tormented and disappointed himself, his weak and impulsive nature took that turn to evil from which perhaps a pious, cheerful, loving helpmate might have saved him. Captious in his temper, drunken in his habits, given greatly to those open grievous twits and taunts in the wars of home, which seem to lookers-on so indecent and embarrassing—and which a man should be taught to govern and conceal in his soul, as he is told to clothe the nakedness of his body.—his children combined an utter absence of respect for him, with a certain degree of prejudiced pity. If they did not think him always in the right in the family quarrels they witnessed, at least they always thought their stepmother in the wrong. 'Poor papa' was their kindest mention of him ; and 'papa's too lazy to care' the common salve to their conscience when doing something that had been absolutely forbidden.

At length came that crisis in their child-life which might be expected. Among the smaller obstinacies about which papa was 'too lazy to care,' and which was the subject of fierce reprobation with their stepmother, was the constant presence of two rough terriers, which had been given to the two boys, in the earliest stage of their mutual puppyhood, by the old keeper. Jock and Beadie were installed as idols in their young masters' hearts. Rustling through the brushwood, leaping over the purple heather, panting through the brawling burns, covered with dust or drenched with rain, as the

case might be—in rushed, with a scuffle and a yelp of joy, sniffing for drink, or scratching for a comfortable resting-place, these four-footed plagues, as Lady Ross termed them; following, or followed by, the kilted little lads.

During the brief period allotted to their careless lessons, dog and master eyed each other with an equally intelligible agreement to ‘go out the moment it was over,’ when,—as if at the sound of a signal gun,—the scuffle, shout, yelp, and rush were renewed. Often had Beardie been chased angrily with a whip, to teach him indoor manners; often had Jock been seized by the scruff of his shaggy neck, and tossed out of the low windows; often pulled out from slumbers surreptitiously permitted in the tumbled beds of their sleeping masters; often made to howl for flagrant discovery of bones half gnawed, and fragments of victuals, under those same little couches; often shaken out rudely on the bare floor when curled up for a nap in the plaided counterpanes. But it was in vain that Lady Ross scolded and stormed. The dogs did not understand what she would be at, and the boys were determined that where they went Jock and Beardie should follow.

On one special day, the rushing, yelping, shouting, and scuffling, which attended their entrance, seemed redoubled: the boys had fallen in with an otter-hunt, conducted by an experienced old gillie, their chief friend on the estate. They entered flushed, wet, panting, and joyous, leaving every door on their progress open, including that of the wide oak hall through which a whirl of wind and autumn leaves followed their reckless little heels, as if willing to share in the sport and the confusion. Then, dog and master, alike muddy, breathless and dripping, burst into the presence of Lady Ross, even as she sat in the state drawing-room receiving the somewhat formal visit of the most puissant of all her Scotch neighbours, the dowager Countess of Clochnaben and the invalid earl her son.

‘Are those Sir Neil’s boys? They seem rudish little bears,’ was the polite speech of the dowager; as she hastily drew her ample dress nearer the boundary of the sofa, where the ladies were seated.

‘I told you to hinder that sort of thing,’ said the irate hostess to her husband after her guests had departed.

‘How am I to hinder it?’ replied he sulkily. ‘I’m just wishing you’d let the lads and their dogs be.’

Then rose one of those wild storms about nothing, which are at once the curse and the wonder of ill-mated married life: the wife ‘flyting’ at the husband; the husband swearing at the wife; the

children staring at the loud battle and angry gestures; till, a portion of the wrathful torrent of violence being turned their way, they were ordered off to 'make themselves decent for supper.'

That supper was not eaten, nor greeted otherwise than with bitter cries and regretful tears; for, when the boys recrossed the great hall adorned with the antlers of innumerable stags, they were met by their incensed stepmother. She pointed fiercely through the great arched door, calling out, 'Since there's neither teaching nor managing will rule ye, and your father lets you run wild, we'll see if *I* can find means to make more impression:—I think you'll not forget to-day's otter-hunt in a hurry.'

Through the arch the boys gazed, in the direction indicated by her gaunt finger, and then stood as though she had turned them into stone by some weird spell. For there, on the two lower branches of a stunted old fir-tree, just outside the castle door, hung the two dogs; horrid in their recent death by strangulation; pitiful in their helpless dangling attitudes; executed by a sudden doom! Poor Jock, whose warm kindly brown eyes and rough nose were wont to bury themselves under Douglas's caressing arm; and Beardie, handsome active and frolicsome Beardie, who had leaped so high to Kenneth's stick, and whose long silky coat of iron grey hair had been the admiration of all beholders!

There they hung! wet and draggled and weary looking, as when they came in: but nevermore to dry their coats by the fire; nor lap from the great bowl of water set ready for them by the boys; nor lick the tanned little hands, in mute joy and gratitude, at the end of some pleasant day! There they hung: tongues out; eyes glazed; limbs contracted; with horrid evidences of a bygone struggle ending in a helpless death.

Kenneth was the first to break silence; with a cry that was almost a yell of despair and defiance, he made a dash towards the tree, opening his knife as he went, to cut his favourite down. Douglas stood still; panting, speechless, and breathless; his eyes riveted on poor Jock, as though he had no power to withdraw them from the dreadful sight. Then followed, from both boys, a wild echoing shout for their father—for their father to come and see what had been done to them during the brief interval they had spent in preparations for a more decent appearance in the sitting-room and at the family meal.

Nor did the easily excited ire of that father disappoint the boy's expectations. It went beyond them: it alarmed them by its excess. Louder and more furious, and more and more intermixed with oaths,

grew Sir Neil's rapid phrases of reproach to his wife, as the boys, sobbing and exclaiming, kissed the corpses of their canine companions; till, at length, as with fierce and fearless defiance, taunt for taunt returned in the shrillest of voices, Lady Ross made a step or two in advance towards her husband, the latter seized her by the shoulders, shook her violently, and, with the exasperated words that she had 'done an ill devil's deed,'—and 'he wished from his soul she was hanging up along side of the dogs,'—he thrust her from him against the tall heavy hat-stand that stood at the hall-door. The hat-stand fell over with a crash; and though Lady Ross recovered her balance with a staggering effort, and did not fall, the excitement of the scene proved too much for Douglas, who, throwing himself between the contending parties with a piteous exclamation of horror, suddenly dropped at his father's feet in a dead faint.

He was a fine robust boy; and the burst of emotion and its consequences once over, he rapidly became himself again. But neither of the lads would come in to supper, or give any attention to the persistent lecturing with which they were favoured by their step-mother. They remained out in the early moonlight till they had buried their dogs; came in, and went heavily up to their own room, where they were yet heard sobbing and talking for a while; and, in the morning, the two little rebels were missing. They had run away.

The preparations made by children on these occasions are not very extensive. A bag of oatmeal, a few apples, and a very slender remainder of pocket-money, would not have taken them far on their projected road to high fortune; though in their first eager four miles they had considered it quite a settled thing that Douglas should become a warrior and statesman like the Duke of Wellington; and Kenneth, at the very least, Lord Mayor of London.

They were pursued and brought back—footsore hungry and exhausted—at the end of their first day's march; before they had got even to the suburbs of the market-town from which this plunge into worldly success was to be made.

While they crept once more (less loth than boyish pride might have avowed) into their accustomed beds, a parental council was held. Lady Ross was of opinion that they should both be 'flogged for their escapade within an inch of their lives;' her husband, that no further notice should be taken of it; since they probably had had a sickening of such attempts, in their failure and fatigue. But the upshot of the debate was, that Douglas and Kenneth were parted; the elder sent to Eton for civilized training, in token of a certain

concession to Lady Ross's English views on the subject ; and the younger delivered over in gloom and disgrace to a neighbouring Scotch minister, who had one other forlorn pupil, and a reputation for patient teaching.

Undoubtedly the best education for man or boy is to mingle much with his fellows ; and that is why a man educated at a public school is in general better educated than one who has received tolerably careful training at home. Lessons may not be so well learned, but life is learned ; emulation is roused ; the mind is not allowed to roost and slumber, like a caged bird on a perch.

Douglas Ross owed to his inimical stepmother an immense service as to his future ; though in her disposal of him she had merely consulted her desire to be rid of him, and certain consequential notions of how ' the heir ' should be educated. Had she had a boy of her own, perhaps some grudging might have mingled with such plans ; but the sharp-browed Alice was her only child, and was an interest apart, and in fact subordinate, to Lady Ross's feelings of family consequence. Young Douglas would have justified a nobler pride. Frank, intelligent, spirited, and yet amenable to true discipline now that such discipline had replaced the alternate neglect and tyranny of home, he was popular alike with masters and companions ; while the simplicity of such early training as he had had, rendered him insensible to the shallow compliments of strangers, struck with his personal beauty and free untutored grace of manner.

The holidays of many a ' half ' to come, were days of rapture. To see Kenneth waiting and watching under the tall fir-trees at the turn of the road where the mail-coach was to drop him ; to leap down, and strain him to his heart ; to exhibit his prize-books, on which the younger brother would gaze with a sigh of curiosity—and then to plunge back into the wild happy life of the Highlands—this made home a temporary paradise. ' Days among the heather,' to those who have been brought up in the wild mountain-life of Scotland, are days of intoxicating joy.

Once more with his brother ; once more in his kilt, clambering here and there, lounging under the silver birches by the blue lake's side, gliding over its silver surface in the coble-boat, fishing for trout, and waking the echoes as they rowed home with many a snatch of song ; uncovering his glossy head for very sport in the sudden shower, and feeling a wild delight in the mountain storms— young Douglas's holidays for the first three years were days of unalloyed delight.

Then came the gradual change which circumstances bring,—a change which is not exactly alienation, but separation, between those who are differently situated as to occupations, associations, and aims. A certain discontent, instead of approbation, took possession of his father's mind. The prize-books were tossed aside, with some discouraging observation as to the value of 'book-learning,' and the absurd disproportion of such rewards with the expense of such an education. Douglas himself had a sorrowful instinct that Kenneth's life was narrowing round him,—he was a companion in all purposeless pursuits to his father, but the main elements of improvement were wanting. He smoked and sat up drinking whisky-toddy,—he shot and walked with Sir Neil. But he did nothing, and learnt nothing. It was the life neither of a boy nor a man; and the dawdling leisure left from its loose occupations was spent by Kenneth in familiar visitings wherever a pretty face smiled on the threshold of a farm-house, or a bothy in the glen; in idle talk with gamekeepers, farmers, and petty tenants; and in making love betwixt jest and earnest to the miller's youthful daughter at the Falls of Torrieburn; Torrieburn being a small separate estate of Sir Neil's, which was settled on his younger son.

In his own loving earnest way, Douglas hinted good counsel, but without good effect. Kenneth was angry; was saddened; was somehow suspicious that his Eton brother was 'coming the fine gentleman over him;' and a coldness stole between them, dreamy and impalpable as the chill white mist which rises among the hills at the beginning of winter, and hides all our pleasant haunts and familiar trysting-places with its colourless and ghostlike veil.

With his stepmother he was on even worse terms than during his comfortless boyhood. Disliking her profoundly, and yet attempting a certain show of courtesy to his father's wife, his only reward was the bitter sneer with which she spoke of him as 'that *very* stately and gentlemanly young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross.'

With his father he was restless and uncomfortable. Too young when a resident at home, in the memorable days of the dog-hanging, to be the companion Kenneth had gradually become; and old enough now to see all the defects of such companionship; he inwardly groaned in spirit at his own incapacity to give, or to receive, satisfaction from communion with one who in his best days was a poor specimen of what the head of a family should be, and whose worse days were now come—days of mingled apathy and discontent, of absolute repugnance to the nearest tie in it, his irritable and irritating wife; of selfish craving for what amusement or

comfort he could get out of the society of the half-educated lad he had kept at Glenrossie without a thought of his future ; and of angry surprise at the transformation, as it seemed to him, of the lovely, ardent boy whose same rebellions against discipline and Lady Ross he had so often protected, into the proud, thoughtful adolescent, who ' seemed to think he would advise the whole family.'

In this state of mind was Sir Neil, when Douglas asked that his brother might be put to some profession, and that he himself might be sent to one of the universities ; and for once Sir Neil and Lady Ross united their discordant voices in a chorus of agreement, holding that his demands were preposterous, and not to be granted.

Sir Neil considered that already he had had too much of ' book-learning,' which was ' never of much use,' and Lady Ross told him that he was ' puffed with presumption' in venturing to chalk out for himself what was to be done.

Even Kenneth, the loved and clung-to Kenneth, was provoked ; and hastily assured his brother it was lucky he had not succeeded in persuading his father, for that he, Kenneth, would certainly not have gone to study for any profession whatever. He meant to live at Torrieburn, and there'd always be grouse and oateake enough to satisfy his notions of life. The tears started into Douglas's eyes,—but there was no one to heed or understand what passed in his heart ; and no evidence of that day's mortal struggle, except in a brief letter to his Eton ' chum' Lorimer Boyd ; younger son of that Dowager Clochemaben whose visit with the sickly young Earl of Glenrossie had been the exciting cause of the sudden execution of Jock and Beadie, and the exile of the run-away boys. The letter ran as follows :—

' To LORIMER BOYD, Esq. Oriel College, Oxford.

' MY DEAR LORIMER,—I am not to go to college ; so I shall see no more of you at present ! My father has consented, however, to my entering the army. Heaven grant I may do something more with life, than accept the bare fact of living ! Kenneth is to remain on at home. I am sorry for Kenneth. Such a fine, quick, handsome lad ! I wish you could see him. I wish my father had given him a chance. Do not forget me, old fellow ; I shall never forget you. I send you a little Elzevir " Horace " you and I used to read sometimes together under the trees by the river, that hot summer when you sprained your arm and had to give up rowing in the boats. I would be glad you wrote to me. I am sure you will, Lorimer. I don't mind owning to you that I feel so lonesome and

disappointed I could cry like a girl. I hope you will distinguish yourself at college; you were much the cleverest fellow at Eton. I end with a *nil desperandum*; for, after all, I trust to our future meeting. You are a Scotchman, so am I; and some day I suppose I shall be at home again. Meanwhile, since I cannot be at college, I am glad to be a soldier.

‘Yours ever,’

‘DOUGLAS ROSS.’

CHAPTER II.

PASSING AWAY.

IF there were not daily examples to familiarize us with the marvel, we might wonder at the strange way in which Nature asserts herself; or rather, at the effects of Nature and accident combined, in the characters of individuals.

We see children, all brought up in one home, under the same tutelage, as different as night from day. Pious sons and daughters sprung from infidel and profligate parents; unredeemed and incorrigible rascals from honest and religious fathers; fools, that fritter away the vanishing hours they themselves scarcely know how, born where steady conduct and deep knowledge seemed the very life of those around them,—and earnest, intelligent, and energetic souls springing up like palm-trees in the desert sand, where never a thought has been given to mental culture or religious improvement.

Out of that home which looked so stately and beautiful among the surrounding hills, and held such grovelling inmates; the castled home of Glenrossie—went forth at least one scion of the good old name worthy to bear it. Douglas Ross drew his sword in the service of his country, in India, in America, and in China; he rose rapidly to command, and proved as strict in authority as he had formerly been in obedience. Beloved, respected, and somewhat feared, his name was one already familiar in men’s mouths as having greatly distinguished himself in the profession he had chosen, when he was recalled to Scotland, with leave of absence from the military command he held, to attend the rapidly succeeding death-beds of his father and brother.

Whether, in dying, some dim consciousness of his folly and injustice smote Sir Neil,—or that he was merely haunted by his lingering love for the son who had been left with him through recent years,—he made a sort of appeal to the elder when bending anxiously over him to gather the failing words. ‘You’ll look after Kenneth,’ he said; ‘he has greatly mismanaged! You’ll help him—Torrieburn’s been ill sorted—he’s let himself down, rather—with those people. My dear, be good to Kenneth—maybe he’ll settle in the way of marriage, and do well yet. You’ll have to make amends to ——’

Sir Neil made great efforts to conclude this sentence, but was unable; he held convulsively by his son’s hand; looked in his face with that dying wistfulness which, once seen, is never forgotten; and fell back on the pillow exhausted—the anxieties, errors, and hopes of this world at an end for ever.

Brief was the time allotted to Douglas for any obedience to his father’s dying wishes, as far as his brother was concerned.

Kenneth had insisted on riding home to Torrieburn every night, in spite of the urging of his brother. He did not seem to believe the end so near. He was wilful as to being at home in his own bachelor abode. He hated his stepmother, he said, and his half-sister, and did not wish to see any of their mock grief, for the father who had at least treated him always with affection.

The night that father died, he rode away as usual. Torrents of rain swept to and fro by the wild gusts of an autumnal storm, whistling and moaning through the ancient fir-woods at the back of the castle, greeted his departure. The crash of trees blown down, the roar of the swollen torrent, sounded loud in the ear of his brother, as he stood grasping his hand at the open door, and bidding him good night. ‘If you will, you will, Kenneth; you were always a wilful fellow; but what a night!’ And for a few minutes yet, Douglas Ross watched the receding form, full of grace and activity, of the handsome rider. ‘I shall be with you early in the morning,’ were his last words, as he waved his hand and put spurs to his horse.

But neither that nor any other morning ever brought Kenneth Ross to the castle again. Their father died in the night; and Douglas was still pondering over the anxious, needless recommendation of his brother to his kindness, when the day dawned, as it had set, in storms of drenching rain.

Plans of affection, of hope,—rational useful plans,—chased each other like the wind-borne clouds through the mind of the new-made

heir of Glenrossie. Yes, he *would* 'look after Kenneth,'—Kenneth, and Torrieburn, and every fraction of his destiny! He would set that destiny to rights. He would think over a suitable marriage for him. He would give, lend, do, anything to get him out of the embarrassments his father had hinted at. And then he remembered the other concluding sentence of that father's dying voice: 'You'll have to make amends to—' To whom? Could it be some one who had already assisted Kenneth? Or perhaps to his stepmother? Sir Neil had never uttered his wife's name; he had begged she might not be present while he talked with his son at that solemn midnight hour. He meant to see her again in the morning. Could he have been going to recommend her, also, to Douglas's kindness?

He went to her room to break the news. He found her cold, impassive; indifferent to the fact; suspicious of his intentions. She pronounced but one sentence: it was, 'You are aware, I suppose, that I've a right to stay at the castle for a year from this date?'

Her daughter was with her; she also looked at Douglas with her grave, shrewd eyes. There was a certain beauty of youth and girlhood about her, and her half-brother gazed at her with pity. He took her hand and said gently, 'Even if there were no right, do you think I would drive you away? This is Home.'

Ailie drew her little thin hand out of his, as though she had been slipping off a glove. She sat mute. She gave no token even of having heard him, except withdrawing her eyes from his face, and casting a sidelong, furtive glance at her rigid mother.

While Sir Douglas still lingered—in the sort of embarrassment felt by warm-hearted persons who have made a vain demonstration of sympathy—a sudden tumult of vague sounds, the arrival of a horseman, the chatter of servants, the flinging open of doors, struck heavily through the silence of the room. 'There is Kenneth!' said Sir Douglas, as he hastily turned and opened the door into the broad, handsome corridor at the head of the great oak staircase immediately fronting the entrance. The old butler was already there: he put his hands out as if deprecating the advance of a step: 'Mr. Kenneth was thrown from his horse last night, sir, and the doctor says he'll no live till the morrow,' was all he could utter.

Another death-bed—another and a dearer!

Sir Douglas rode to Torrieburn almost as desperately as his brother had done the night before. He found the handsome rider he had fondly watched at his departure, a bruised, shattered, groaning wretch. His horse, overspurred, and bewildered by the drifting rain and howling storm, had swerved on the old-fashioned sharp-

angled bridge that crossed the Falls of Torrieburn close to his home, and had dashed with his rider over the low parapet in among the rocks below.

Close to home; luckily, close to home!

Near enough for the wild shout he gave as he fell, and even the confused sound of the roll of shaken-down stones, and terrible weight of horse and rider falling on the bed of the torrent, to reach the house, and the quick ear of one who was waiting and watching there. For Kenneth's bachelor home was not a lonely one. Startling was the picture that presented itself in that drear morning's light when Sir Douglas entered. The weariest frightened form he had ever beheld in the shape of woman, sat at the foot of the bed. Untidy, dishevelled, beautiful; her great white arms stretched out with clasped hands, shuddering every time that Kenneth groaned; her reddish golden hair stealing in tangled locks from under the knotted kerchief, which she had never untied or taken off since she had rushed out into the storm and scrambled down to the Falls the night before. The lower part of her dress still soaked and dripping, covered with mud and moss—one of her loose stockings torn at the ankle, and the blood oozing through—her petticoat, too, torn on that side. She had evidently slipped in attempting to reach the horse and rider.

Douglas spoke first to her, and he spoke to her of herself; not of his brother.

'Och!' she said, and her teeth chattered as she spoke, 'ye'll no mind me, sir! it's naething. I just drappit by one hand frae the brac, in amang the stanes to get at him, and sae gat hurtit. Ou Kenneth! Kenneth! Kenneth! Ou my man! my ain man!' and rocking wildly to and fro while the rain beat against the window, and the storm seemed to rock the trees in unison with her movements, she ceased to speak.

The dying man moved his lips with a strange sort of smile, but no sound came. Douglas knelt down by him; and, as he did so, was conscious of the presence of a little nestling child, the most lovely little face that ever looked out of a picture, that was sitting at the bed-head, serene and hopeful in all this trouble, and saying to him with a shy smile,—‘Are ye the doctor? and will you put daddy a’ richt? We’ve been waiting lang for the doctor.’

No doctor could save Kenneth—no, not if the aching heart of his elder brother had resolved to bring him life at the price of his whole estate. He was fast going—fast! The grief of the ungovernable woman at his bed-foot only vaguely disturbed him. He was

beginning to be withdrawn from earthly sights and earthly sounds. But Sir Douglas tried to calm her. He besought her to be still; to go away and wash her wounded limb and tear-swoln face, and arrange herself, and return, and meanwhile he would watch Kenneth till the doctor came. No, she wouldn't—no, she couldn't—no, he might die while she was out of the way—no, she 'wad see the last o' him, and then dee.' She offered no help; she was capable of no comfort; she kept up her loud lament, so as to bewilder all present; and it was a positive relief to Sir Douglas when, with a sudden shiver through her whole frame, she slid from the bed-foot to the floor in a swoon.

By this time the doctor had arrived, with an assistant, both of them common 'bone-setters' from the village of Torrieburn—rough, untutored, but not unkindly; and perhaps in nothing more kind than in the honest admission that beyond giving restoratives for the time-being, and shifting the bed a little, so as to lessen (not remove) the great agony of human pain that must preface this untimely death, they could do nothing.

Do NOTHING! very solemn and trying are such death-beds; when human love, that seems so strong, stands helpless; listening to the great dreadful sentence, 'You shall see this man whom you love pass to the presence of his Creator in torments inconceivable, and you shall not be able to lift away, no, not so much as one grain of his bitter pain, though you would give half your own life to do it.'

'God's will be dene!' Oh! how hollow sound even those solemn words; while we echo, as it were, the writhing we look on at, in the thrill of aching sympathy that goes through our own corporeal frame; and wait, and wait, and wait, and know that only Death—only Death—can end the anguish; and that when he has ceased to suffer we are alone for ever in the great blank. No more to hear his voice, no more to clasp his hand, no more to be conscious of his love; but to know that somewhere there is a grave, where he who suffered so much lies stiff and still,—and that 'his spirit has returned to God who gave it.'

When the doctor had arranged that dying bed for the best,—and had attended to the miserable woman who had fainted, and had brought her back, pale, exhausted, but quieter, to the sick chamber,—Kenneth made a feeble effort to raise himself; an exertion which was followed by a dreadful groan. Then he murmured twice the name of 'Maggie!—dear Maggie!' and Sir Douglas rose up, and made way for the trembling creature so called upon, to kneel down

in his place : adjuring her, for the love of heaven—for the love of *Kenneth*—not to give way, but keep still ; getting only from her a burst of sobbing, and the words, ‘ Kill me, och ! kill me ! and then maybe ye’ll hush me down.’ There seemed ‘ no hushing her down,’ till suddenly Kenneth said, in a sort of dreamy voice, ‘ Maggie, you’ll call to mind the birken trees—the birken trees ! ’

The woman held her breath. There was no need to quiet her now.

‘ The birken trees by the broomy knowe,’ repeated he, dreamily ; and in a low clear tone he added,—‘ I’m sorry, Maggie.’

Then, opening his eyes with a fixed look, he said, ‘ Dear Douglas ! ’ in a tone of extreme, almost boyish tenderness ; and then followed a renewed silence ; broken only by the wild gusty winds outside the house, and the distant sound of the fatal Falls of Torrieburn. All at once, with the rallying strength that sometimes precedes death, he spoke clearly and intelligibly.—‘ Douglas ! be kind—I’m going—I’m dying—be kind to my Kenneth, for the sake of days when we were boys together ! Don’t forsake him ! don’t deny him ;—Have pity too, on Maggie ! ’

A little pause after that, and he spoke more restlessly ;—‘ I’m asking others, and I ought to do it myself. It’s *I* who forsake them : it’s *I* that didn’t pity. I say—I say—are you all here ? Douglas ! the doctor—ah ! yes, and my father’s factor,—Well—I—’

He struggled for a moment, with blue blanched lips ; then, feeling for the little curled head of the child at the further side of his bed, and locking his right hand in the hand of the kneeling woman, he said,—‘ I trust Douglas with these. I declare Margaret Carmichael my WIFE, and I acknowledge Kenneth Carmichael Ross as my lawful son ! ’

The woman gave a suppressed shriek ; she sprang up from her knees, and flung her arms round the dying man with a wild, ‘ Och, I thank ye—I thank ye ! and mither’ll thank ye for ever ! Ou ! my Kenneth ! ’

He turned his head towards her with that unutterable smile that often flits over dying faces. Brighter and fonder his smile could not have been in the days of their first love : ‘ by the broomy knowe, under the birken trees ; ’ and perhaps his thoughts were there, even in that supreme hour. No other word, except a broken ejaculation of prayer, came from him ; only the bystanders ‘ saw a great change ’—the change there is no describing—come over his brow. The anguish of mortal pain seemed to melt into peace. A

great sigh escaped him, such as bursts from the bosom in some sudden relief from suffering, and the handsome man was a handsome corpse.

He who had been so much to that wailing woman, had become it ! ' it ; ' ' the body ; ' that perishable form which had clothed the eternal soul, and was now to be carried away and hidden under the earth, ' to suffer corruption,' and join the unseen throng of those whose place in this world ' shall know them no more.' .

The loud sound of her tempestuous wailing seemed to float out and follow Sir Douglas, as he at length left the house and recrossed the dreadful bridge which had been the scene of that tragedy. The dead horse, whose neck had been broken in the leap, was still lying there ; the waters gurgling round the new obstacle, and waving the glossy mane to and fro, like a row of reeds. The dreary rain was still drifting with the wind against the soaked stems of the fir-trees ; and the scarlet berries and yellowing leaves of the mountain-ash or rowan-tree, tossed and swung above the torrent, far overhead ; dropping now and then a bead of red like a blood-gout, into the whirling waters that swept them away.

Even so were swept away all the hopes, plans, and resolutions made only the night previous in behalf of his brother, by Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie. And as the sobbing storm died down on wood and mountain, and one pale crimson and melancholy streak gleamed light from a sunset that promised a better morrow, even so did the gleaming hope of being of use to little Kenneth (so like the Kenneth his earliest boyish recollections brought back to him !) break through the miserable gloom in his kindly mind.

On arriving at the castle he described the scenes he had witnessed, and the death that had so unexpectedly taken place, to Lady Ross. She heard it, as she had heard of the death of her husband, with frigid composure. Her daughter also seemed unmoved, except by a certain amount of surprise, and the curiosity of one who listens to the account of a strange event.

But when Sir Douglas, endeavouring to repress the evidence how much he himself was moved, wound up his narration by endeavouring to enlist what pity there might be in Lady Ross's heart, for the orphan and his wretched parent, then indeed a slight change was visible in Lady Ross's countenance.

The indifference that had reigned there was replaced by a look of supercilious scorn ; and, when Sir Douglas imprudently faltered— ' Being yourself a mother, I thought perhaps —— ' she flashed that look of scorn full upon him, with the speech, ' I beg to remind you,

Sir Douglas, that I am *not* the mother of children legitimized on a death-bed. Nor am I a miller's daughter; which, I understand, was the social position of Meg Carmichael. I was not ignorant of the indecent infatuation of your brother for that low-born and low-bred girl; and the last thing I should have expected from *you*, on coming into the estates, was the admission of such base claims on the part of persons who have no more real right to Torrieburn than your father's head-keeper, and are about as fit to set up there as lairds of the place.'

CHAPTER III.

CLAY IDOLS.

IN spite of the opinion thus enunciated by the widow of his misguided father, Sir Douglas took up the trust his brother left him in all the simplicity of good faith. Little Kenneth was acknowledged and installed as 'Kenneth Carmichael Ross of Torrieburn;' and a tutor appointed to teach and care for him as the young laird.

Fain would Sir Douglas have removed him from his mother, and from all the early associations of the place; but the same ungovernable spirit, which had struck him with so much amazement at the time of poor Kenneth's death, was displayed in all her dealings with others. Her grief was despair: it was followed by a nervous fever: the fever by a disturbed state of nerves bordering on insanity. And then she recovered,—like a creature that has moaned for its whelps and gradually forgotten them.

No sooner had she lifted from the pressure of that woe, than a wilfulness exceeding all poor Kenneth had ever shown, took its place. She considered herself, under that declaration of marriage, as the natural occupier and possessor of Torrieburn House till her son should be grown up. She established her mother there, as indeed might have been expected; her father, the old miller of Torrieburn, coming frequently over—sometimes to complain of the inconvenience of his wife's residence apart from him, sometimes to quarrel both with her and her daughter, sometimes to carouse with companions for whom she could scarcely refuse to provide whisky in a limited or unlimited quantity. With the first tutor appointed to the care of her son she entered into relations so unseemly, after the subsiding of her grief, that, the fact coming to the ear of Sir

Douglas, he wrote her a letter of remonstrance ; and substituted a somewhat stern but very sensible pedagogue in his stead, with whom she incessantly quarrelled, and from whose authority she encouraged her boy to appeal. Sir Douglas was always receiving letters from the boy or his mother complaining of severity, complaining of injustice ; till, at length, wearied out by petitions and oburgations, a fresh substitution was made, and a tutor sent of good education, with excellent recommendations, and private instructions to ‘ show as much indulgence as was consistent with good discipline.’

This time Meg Carmichael made further changes impossible, by *marrying* the tutor : and the ill-assorted household continued on the most comfortless footing,—the wayward, handsome woman alternately quarrelling with her husband, and giving herself airs as ‘ Mrs. Ross Heaton of Torrieburn,’ or bestowing on him some of the wild adoration which had formerly been the portion of poor Kenneth ; and the tutor-husband vainly trying to make head,—in the house that was scafcely to be called his own,—against the drunken old miller and his boon companions ; the bustling and shrewish old woman his wife ; and the disposition to shirk all control and all guidance in the lovely little boy, whose position, as the future ‘ laird,’ was acknowledged, in different forms of folly and flattery, by all around him in the narrow circle of home. A hint from Sir Douglas that it would soon be time to send him to a good school, was received with such a storm of indignation and despair, such ill-spelt ill-worded letters of passionate remonstrance, that Sir Douglas put off all further alteration in young Kenneth’s destiny till he could get home from his command, and personally superintend the necessary changes. That the boy was well taught by his tutor-father was evidenced by the letters he wrote ; and which, though they half-nettled, half-amused Sir Douglas by their tone of presumption, addressing him entirely ‘ *d’égal en égal*,’ were such as no boy of inferior education or inferior intelligence could possibly have penned.

At length the day came when Sir Douglas Ross of Glenrossie returned as a resident to the home of his fathers ! His stepmother had been dead some time ; but her daughter had, by his own express wish, continued to reside in the castle ; nor had he the heart, when he found that lonely young spinster there, to enter on the topic of her removal. It would be time enough for that, Sir Douglas thought, when he was married ; if he ever married. Her mother had been odious, but that was not the daughter’s fault ; and there was nothing offensive in her, personally. On the contrary, she appeared especially anxious to preserve the home she had acquired,

by the most absolute acquiescence in her half-brother's wishes, and a disposition to see to all those minor arrangements of a household which a man cannot see to himself, and which that astute and reserved little personage performed as well as any hired housekeeper, if not better.

When Sir Douglas first beheld the boy for whom, unseen, he had been caring, and whose future he was so anxiously about to arrange, soldier though he was, he burst into tears !

Kenneth stood before him. Kenneth in the days before they were parted—Kenneth when they used to climb the hills with their arms round each other's necks—Kenneth before the cold cloud of difference mistily rose between them. And though Sir Douglas kept to his resolution, and sent the lad both to school and college,—undeterred by the loud wailing of Mrs. Maggie Ross, who ran along the edge of the highroad weeping and waving her handkerchief at the mail coach the first day he departed, and constantly made his recurring holidays terms of the most corrupting influence of folly and over-indulgence,—yet the depths of love he felt for that orphan lad were such as rarely exist even in a father's heart for a favourite child. It was a passion with Sir Douglas. What this new Kenneth did, said, or thought, was the principal occupation of his own more mature mind. Inwardly he vowed never to marry : to bring the boy up as his heir : to make his home not at Torrieburn but Glenrossie, and suffer that living image of his dead brother to ' come after him,' when he, too, should be dead and gone.

As time rolled on, however, much anxiety was mingled with Sir Douglas's love. The wayward son of that wayward race seemed turning out yet more wayward and rebellious than all that had preceded him. Drunkenness, a love of low company, of being what is vulgarly termed ' cock of the walk,' the most profuse extravagance as to money matters, and a sort of careless defiance of all authority, more especially of the constituted authority of his stately uncle, whom at this time he and all around him took to calling by the title I have already commented upon, ' Old Sir Douglas,'—all these defects, and more, showed themselves in Kenneth's son. And all these defects did Sir Douglas believe he could, by care and resolution, weed out of that hot young head and heart, as the gardener weeded the broad walks in the long-forsaken gardens of Glenrossie. Twice had he paid the debts of the young collegian, and received in answer to his imploring lectures, the most satisfactory promises for the future. A third time he called upon his uncle to clear him ; and this time Sir Douglas thought fit, greatly to the young man's

discontent, to consider his college career as closed, and send him to travel. Fain would he have made the lad his own companion, but there was so much chance of ill-will and hot blood in the attempts at control over his actions that he dreaded to undertake it, lest it should make 'a break' between them.

With the most liberal allowance it was possible to grant, and the most intelligent companion he could find,—little over Kenneth's own age, and full of good and amiable qualities,—Sir Douglas despatched his nephew on what in old-fashioned days was called 'the grand tour;' and, with a pang at his affectionate heart, stood on the steps at the castle entrance, to see that handsome, careless head smile a final farewell from the chaise window; and waited till the sound of wheels died away in the distance, and lifted his cap with a half-murmured prayer, before he turned back into the great hall.

There, everything looked as it did in his own boyhood and adolescence! Looked as it did when he ran away from home; when he was sent to school; when he returned in eager gladness to be pressed in Kenneth's arms; when he tried to persuade his father to give Kenneth some profession; and when he looked out into the stormy night, and saw that brother ride away for the last time.

And as all these scenes chased each other through his musing mind, all terminated in the one leading thought, what would be the future of Kenneth's son?

The accounts sent from time to time were far from reassuring. Young Kenneth acknowledged no power of control in the student-companion allotted for his tour, but treated him as a sort of confidential courier; bound to take all trouble off his hands, provide for his amusements, and carefully administer to his comforts, but nothing more. The one vice, too, from which Kenneth had hitherto been guarded, that of immorality,—which his mother, remembering her own destiny, watched over with a jealous care she bestowed on nothing else,—seemed rapidly to be taking rank among the young laird's already established errors; till at length Sir Douglas received one morning, by the early post at Glenrossie, a very long, very tender, very comfortless letter from the friend of Eton days, Lorimer Boyd, then at the English Legation at Naples, informing him that young Kenneth, whose acquaintance he had made with the most eager interest for Sir Douglas's sake, was becoming a noted character among the English visitors, with anything but credit to himself and family; that the young man who had been engaged to accompany him, desired to resign his trust into Sir Douglas's hands;

feeling it to be positively dishonest to continue receiving a high salary, as travelling tutor, for the supposed performance of duties which the disposition of Kenneth Ross rendered it impossible to fulfil. Finally, that he thought Sir Douglas could not do better than come himself to Italy, where Lorimer Boyd would be overjoyed to see him, and where new arrangements might, he hoped, be made; ending with the ominous words, 'for, if something is not done, and that speedily, I should fear that this young lad, to whom you have shown such generous kindness, will turn out utterly worthless.'

The next day saw Sir Douglas Ross on his way to London, to procure his passport and proceed to his destination. He reached it without event; and, in the satisfaction evinced by Lorimer Boyd, and the pleasant converse of that old friend, half forgot the pain of observing that his unexpected coming had produced in young Kenneth no other evidence of emotion than a sort of discontented surprise.

'Well, well,' thought the uncle, indulgently, 'he probably knows he has been complained of, and I must make allowance for that.'

In the evening, fidgeting a little over the long colloquy after their late dinner, at which Lorimer Boyd was the sole guest, Kenneth said, 'I am now going out; going to a party,—a very decent family party,' added he, with a half saucy, half angry smile. 'Will you come too, Uncle Douglas? I know Mr. Lorimer Boyd is dying to get there, instead of talking any more to you, for there is to be amateur music, and some of his particular friends are to sing.'

The words were spoken with emphasized meaning, and something of gloom and displeasure overshadowed Lorimer Boyd's countenance. Apparently, in spite of assumed carelessness, the young man felt this; for he added hastily, 'I believe he's as fond of music as you are, uncle, and that is saying a good deal.'

'My dear boy, I'll go wherever you are both going; we can all go together; if Lorimer will undertake to introduce me, I shall be charmed to plunge at once into the dissipations of Naples.'

Lorimer started out of some sort of reverie in which he had been absorbed; and, with half a sigh and half a laugh, he said, 'I fear you won't find much to charm you in the set that are at present in Naples; but this is a pleasant house; and certainly the music is divine.'

Lorimer Boyd made his introduction with a degree of shyness, which no experience of the world had conquered in him; but stately Sir Douglas was greeted with great eagerness, as a new comer

amongst the little society ; nor were there wanting looks of surprised admiration and whispers of inquiry, as the handsome soldier made his way through the busy crowd to a place near the piano.

For it was true that Sir Douglas was very fond of music ; and the one faint recollection he retained of his mother was the shape of her lovely mouth and the soft darkness of her eyes, singing some snatch of an old ballad of unhappy love :—

‘ He turned him round and right about
All on that foreign shore ;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With “ Adieu for evermore, my dear,
Adieu for evermore ! ” ’

Nothing is so capricious as memory. Why one incident is remembered and all others forgotten—why a person with whom we have lived in intimacy for years is always recalled by one, or, at the most, by two or three different aspects, on occasions neither more nor less important than a thousand others,—are mysteries of the working of the brain where these memories are packed away, which the profoundest of our philosophers have been, and are, unable to solve. But certain it is that among other caprices of memory Sir Douglas, who had lost his mother in his childhood, remembered her chiefly by her songs ; and above all by that versified fare-well which could have conveyed no idea to a child’s mind beyond the vague sadness of intonation. Whenever he thought of his mother, he heard that stanza float upon the air. He was thinking of her now, in the midst of that assembly of strangers ; with no other mainspring to those thoughts than the sudden touch given by his nephew’s remark that he was fond of music.

His thoughts wandered, too, to a beautiful German fable as to the effect of certain singing—one of their wild stories of water spirits ; in which the hero, impatient at the old ferryman not being in attendance to punt him across a river, *swears* a good deal ; is stopped by a young girl who says she is the ferryman’s daughter, and offers to punt him over in her father’s absence ; accepts the offer, but is greatly troubled in his mind by the fact that the reeds keep bowing wherever the boat passes, though there is not a breath of wind ; and that, as the young girl herself bends to the water, her face is reflected there, not as she actually appears, but with a wreath of lilies round her head. He comprehends immediately (as people do, in dreams and in German ballads), that she is something supernatural,—and spends the remainder of his shortened and grieving days in perpetually paddling in and out among the reeds ; calling

for her, looking for her, pining for her, because, as the poet writes it, he has been bewitched 'by that little red mouth so full of songs!'

Sir Douglas was roused from his fanciful musing, by a real song; and, by some strange coincidence, a German song. A young lady had sat down to the piano. His nephew was standing by her, waiting to turn the leaf when the verse should be completed. She shook her head gently, and said, in a low voice, 'I know them all by heart.' Then came the rich melody of one of those soft contralto voices the very sound of which gives the sensation of a caress to the listener; rich and powerful but a little trembling too,—not with the trembling of shyness, but with that peculiar *tremolo* natural to some voices, which rather adds to, than takes away from their power.

A German song; a German 'Good-night:' something ineffably coaxing soothing and peaceful in its harmonious notes. Involuntarily Sir Douglas sighed! He felt a strange contrast between the anxiety that had prompted his hurried journey—the storms of his past life,—and his present feverish fatigue and worry,—with that delicious lullaby!

The girl who was singing, glanced towards him, at the sound of his sigh; with soft hazel eyes that seemed made to match her voice. Then she asked something in an undertone of young Kenneth, and the reply was distinctly heard; 'It is my Uncle Douglas.'

The young lady's reply was also audible, in the silence that followed her song. She said, in a tone of great surprise, 'That, Sir Douglas? *that*, Sir Douglas Ross?'

'Yes,' said Kenneth, testily; 'why not?'

'Oh! I don't know,' said the girl, laughing shyly; 'only it is not at all my idea of him. I never should have guessed that to be him, from your way of talking. I expected ——'

'Expected what?'

'I don't know; but I should never have guessed that gentleman to be your Uncle and Guardian, "Old Sir Douglas."'

As she spoke the last words, she again looked up at the newly-arrived stranger. Sir Douglas's eyes were fixed upon her. It was but too evident he had overheard what she had said. Both felt embarrassed as their glances met. Sir Douglas coloured to the temples; and the young lady blushed, and looked down at the ivory keys of the piano-forte: those familiar little friends whose aspect could not add to her shyness as did this interchange of human gazing.

And Kenneth also looked down at the keys ; and turning over the leaves of the music-book, which still remained open, he sharply bit his under-lip ; while a very sulky expression of vexation darkened over his very handsome young face.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE pleasant evening was followed by a painful morning. Sir Douglas ascertained from Lorimer Boyd that, with the one exception of Lady Charlotte Skifton's (where that evening had been passed), Kenneth Ross had scarcely footing in one respectable house in Naples. His nights were spent at the theatre, the gaming-table, and in wild orgies with the idlest of an idle Neapolitan aristocracy ; and his days in recovering from the debauch of the night.

Sums perfectly fabulous, considering his position and the amount of his very moderate fortune, were owing in all directions ;—and thrice, but for the painstaking interference and discretion of Lorimer Boyd,—the result of quarrels on the most trivial or the most scandalous grounds, would have been a meeting with adversaries not very nice in their code of honour, and infinitely better accustomed to the use of pistols.

To all remonstrance about his gambling or other debts he had constantly affirmed that it would be 'all right ;' that 'Old Sir Douglas' would pay them ; and, with a spirit of exaggeration partly wilful, and partly arising from ignorance of all things in his uncle's affairs except the extreme readiness to assist himself which had always been displayed, he represented himself as nephew to a millionaire ; and was indeed looked upon in the indolent and profligate circles he frequented, as related to a sort of Scotch prince ; whose coffers overflowed with gold for which he had no better use than the pampering of his brother's son, the idol of his bachelor life and his eventual heir.

Half melancholy, and half provoked, Sir Douglas left his hotel for the lodging taken by his graceless favourite in one of the palazzos on the Chiaja. In the anteroom he found an Italian valet, smoking one of his master's cigars as he leaned carelessly from the window overlooking the Giardin' Reale ; with no other occupation, apparently, than that of watching the swarming crowd, whose

ceaseless shouting and chattering form so strange a contrast to our own more silent and business-like population. The valet was extremely reluctant to admit Sir Douglas. 'Sua Eccellenza,'—as he termed Kenneth,—had gone to a masked ball, after the musical *soirée* at Lady Charlotte's; had only returned at daylight, and was not yet awake. But on receiving the explanation that the parties were related, and that he beheld before him that millionaire Milord of Scotland, of whose unexpected arrival even he had been told as of an important if not satisfactory event, he became as obsequious as he had been recalcitrant; begging his Excellency to walk into the other Excellency's apartment, where he would speedily wake the sleeping Excellency, and inform him of the illustrious Excellency's visit.

Sir Douglas got rid of the bowing valet, forbidding him to disturb his master. As he passed through Kenneth's bedroom, he paused and stood a few moments, with folded arms, leaning against the silk hangings and embroidered mosquito curtains of the luxurious bed, contemplating the sleeper. It was nearly noon, but the dim shadowy light from the Venetian blinds, broken by narrow streaks of sunshine that seemed to quiver and ripple on the floor, as if reflected from the dazzling bay below,—could not disturb his slumbers. The wonderful likeness of Kenneth to his father, in that soft dreamy light, melted away the displeasure in Sir Douglas's heart. What to do with him, how to set matters right for him, and how to reform him, was his sole thought.

'He is yet but young,' sighed the uncle, as he passed into the sitting-room; where the open windows admitted at once the brilliant glow of a southern sun, and as much fresh air as Naples can boast in these quarters on the Chiaja. Little enough: since, all along that coast-built street, lingers a compound odour of stale fruit, church incense, tar, and fishing-nets; reeking beasts of burden, and the cheese and garlic of poverty-stricken and dirty lazzaroni.

In the principal sitting-room everything was in the same style of confused luxury as in the bedroom. Parisian fauteuils and sofas in handsome chintz covers,—hired in to assist the indolence of the occupant,—formed a strange contrast, and looked, as it were, doubly negligent, by the side of the faded splendour of the tight and upright satin chairs and banquettes which formed the original furniture of the Palazzo; such furniture being indeed but sparsely supplied; the real owner making an arrangement very common in Italy—namely, letting the under and upper apartments, and inhabiting the principal floor himself. A quantity of little paper

volumes of French romances, and a guitar, half-buried in sheets of music—some of it new, and some tattered and soiled and scribbled over—were the only symptoms of occupation, if we except two or three handsome pipes and an open box of cigars.

‘He is yet but young;’ and ‘Did I do right in sending him abroad?’ was doubtfully repeated in the mind of the perplexed uncle; not without a sorrowful consciousness that his own youth, and his own residence in various foreign countries, had been very differently spent, though *he* had had no friend or counsellor to guide and overlook him.

Absorbed in these reflections—looking out on the bright bay without seeing it, and scarcely conscious even of the shrill sound of multitudinous voices and ceaseless roll of vehicles in the streets below—it was not till young Kenneth laid a hand on his shoulder, and greeted him with a sort of tired good-morrow, that Sir Douglas was even aware of his presence. Then the imprudent uncle plunged at once into all he had been ruminating over; all he had to say to the erring nephew. Warmly and rapidly he spoke—of Kenneth’s extravagance, his drunkenness, his idleness, his debts; of the absolute necessity of his instantly selecting a profession, whether army, navy, law, or diplomacy; of the journey to Naples having been made in fear and trouble solely on his account (with a frank admission that Lorimer Boyd’s friendly report had brought about that journey); of the determination Sir Douglas had come to, to tighten the reins, and so prevent the self-indulgent ruin of the young man who stood before him!

A man who rises after a late ball, and is thus suddenly set upon before he has even breakfasted, is not likely to be very patient; nor did either of the interlocutors come of a patient race. Kenneth’s answers were full of that blind and boundless ingratitude which belongs to early youth. He refused to recognise in anything that had been done for him anything for which he had to be grateful; he utterly defied all authority; he could not see how Sir Douglas could assume to exercise any. He, Kenneth, was Ross of Torrieburn, and Sir Douglas was Ross of Glenrossie—a richer man, that was all. Lorimer Boyd was an intolerable prig, and a meddlesome, treacherous idiot; and he, Kenneth, well knew to what cause he might attribute his uncalled-for interference.

He had little doubt (unless Sir Douglas had greatly mismanaged during his long minority) that his debts could be paid with the greatest ease: as to a profession, his father had no profession, and he himself desired nothing of the kind. He loved every inch of

Torrieburn too well to go about the world like the Wandering Jew, as he considered Sir Douglas had done all his life, for no earthly reason. He had never asked, or wished, to come abroad,—but since he had come (by Sir Douglas's desire), he was determined to enjoy himself, and no earthly power should prevent him from doing so. As to the accusation of drunkenness, it was not true; and if he did occasionally get drunk, so did all the men he had ever known, either at college or since; and as to other temptations, he had infinitely greater temptations than other people, being handsomer, quicker-witted, and more fitted for social enjoyment than ninety-nine men in a hundred; so that, though it was all very well for common-place fellows to be tied down to common-place rules, it wouldn't do for *him*, and he thought his uncle mad to expect it!

Finally, with a saucy toss of his handsome young head, and a look of defiance at land and sea, as he turned from the open window and dropped into one of the lounging arm-chairs preparatory to beginning his late breakfast, he advised Old Sir Douglas not to get into 'that humbugging way of lecturing' that comes upon men in later life, but to remember the days when he himself was young; when, doubtless, he indulged to the full in all that early harvest of fleeting pleasures of which he was now seeking to deprive his ill-used nephew.

Sir Douglas almost prefaced with an impatient groan the burst of passionate reply with which he met this tirade. 'In the first place,' he said, 'if I had made debts my father would not have cleared them, even had they been reckoned by hundreds instead of thousands, as I fear yours will be. In the next place, I had a profession in which—whatever may be *your* opinion of its opportunities for pleasure—strict discipline, and the conduct of a gentleman, are imperative even in time of peace; and I am thankful to say that of those leisure times I saw but little.'

A proud, evanescent flush passed over the fine frank face as he spoke; and then he continued eagerly and sadly:—

'Oh! my dear Kenneth, do think there is something more to be done with life than merely to enjoy it! And, for God's sake, don't take the tone you have just taken with me, of that morbid selfish individuality that supposes its own temptations or advantages greater than those of other people. Take your place freely and frankly amongst them, without expecting too much, or thinking too highly of yourself, or offending by assumptions which they won't recognise, and which only lead to quarrels. Depend upon it, there is no such thing upon earth, as a man so intensely superior to his fellow-men

that he should stand exempt from common rules of conduct. God does not permit such gaps of distance among His creatures. He gives to all, something; and he gives to *none* the sort of superiority you would claim. "That faultless monster which the world ne'er saw," is a line from a true poet and philosopher. I know but one thing, Kenneth, in which you excel other men, and that is, that you are handsomer than most men; but how far will that one advantage go, in this world?"

'Well, a good way,'—muttered the youth, with a sulky smile, as he broke the shell of a second egg;—'ask your wise friend Lorimer Boyd else.'

'My friend Lorimer Boyd may overvalue an advantage he has not, as you overvalue the advantages you have. Nevertheless, he might please where you would not; and most assuredly in the great race of life he would win where you would not. Whether you adopt, or refuse to adopt, a profession, you must (unless you retire to a hermitage) mingle with your fellow-men. To be admired is an accident; but to be beloved is in every one's power. You *must*, if you mean to be socially welcome, keep some prudence and decency in view; you must be patient and respectful to some men, cordial and even-tempered with others; and, above all, you must accept, in lieu of such foolish self-assertion as broke from you but now, the position which most certainly at times will be yours—namely, the finding yourself less gifted, less well informed, less worthy, and less esteemed, than some you consort with. I say *must*, because it is utterly impossible that any man should *always* be the first foremost and best of every given group of men in which he finds himself for the time being.

'And now, my dear boy, cease to pelt that plate with grape-skins, as though it were the author of my unwelcome lecture; and put on your hat, and do the honours of this lovely city to me; for, in spite of all my wanderings, I have never been here. And get me a list of your liabilities, that we may see what should be done. Torrieburn is not California, and even my willingness to aid you, does not extend so far as to be willing to transfer the rents of my estate into the pockets of foreign gamblers.

'Tell me, too, something of your friends and friendships, here; since I am not entirely to rely on that honest arch-traitor my old school-mate Lorimer Boyd. Tell me about the people we were with last night; on whom, indeed, we ought, or rather I ought, to go and leave a card this morning. And get back your smiles, Kenneth, as we walk along; for that is too clouded a brow for so clear a morning.'

The anxious heart hiding its anxiety under this assumed gaiety, touched the wayward young man more than the previous lecture. Kenneth wrung his uncle's hand with some confused expressions of mingled regret and deprecation; and he smiled too (not a very comfortable or satisfactory smile), as they reached the arches of the villa on the heights beyond at Santa Lucia, where Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter resided; murmuring to himself *sotto voce*, as he looked up at the green jalousies that shut out the sultry day from those familiar windows, 'Here, at least, I think I have the advantage over wise Mr. Lorimer Boyd.'

And with this ejaculation he followed Sir Douglas into the house.

CHAPTER V.

FEMININE CHARACTER.

SIR DOUGLAS ROSS was considerably startled when, on the drawing-room door being opened, in lieu of receiving the usual commonplace and easy welcome accorded to morning visitors, he beheld Lady Charlotte sobbing bitterly in the depths of a very comfortable French *causense*, in which she was rather lying than sitting when the two gentlemen arrived. She lifted her embroidered handkerchief from her eyes for an instant, as if disturbed by their entrance, and then recommenced her weeping. The soft-eyed girl who had sung the German 'Good night' the previous evening, was standing by her chair, with an expression of mingled perplexity and sympathy; she murmured, 'Dear mamma, here are friends,' in an expostulating tone; put out one hand shyly to greet Kenneth (leaning with the other on the back of her mother's chair), and repeated the words, 'Here are friends.'

'Zizine! Zizine! Zizine!' sobbed Lady Charlotte.

'Mamma, Zizine will do very well; you will see she will do very well; I will attend to her myself.'

'How can you talk such nonsense, my dear Gertrude? I am sure she will die! Zizine! my poor little Zizine!'

Puzzled beyond measure, and wondering whether a little sister, grandchild, or favourite niece was the subject of lamenting, Sir Douglas made rather a stiff bow, and said hurriedly, 'We have come at a most unfortunate moment; I hope there is no serious cause of anxiety; we will call again later in the day.'

'Oh, no, no; oh, no, no; don't go away; don't leave me; I am sure Mr. Ross would not think of leaving me at such a time! He is always so friendly. Pray don't go—pray don't; it makes me worse, the idea of your going! It makes me worse!'

'Mamma will be better presently,' added the daughter, in a low vexed voice; and she glanced from Kenneth who was biting his lip to repress the dawn of one of his insolent smiles, and looked appealingly in the graver face of his uncle.

'Can we do anything?' asked the latter, kindly.

'Oh, no! pray sit down. I will endeavour to be more composed—pray don't go—no one *can* do anything; it is most afflicting; but don't go. The fact is, Antonio has been so tormented by my English servants (and I am sure I would send every one of them away, sooner than Zizine should suffer), that he utterly refuses to stay with me. I offered him double what he engaged for as courier, but he won't. He said (it was so cruel of him!), he said,'—and here a renewed burst of sobbing interrupted the explanation—'that—that it was ridiculous to expect him to stay for the sake of a "*piccola bestia*" (that was what he called Zizine), when he was made quite *triste*, day and night, by the enmity of my servants. Now, you know, they have no enmity at all to him; only they don't like him; and if he had any generosity he wouldn't consider his own feelings in the matter, but mine. Think what a goose he must be, to go and fret in that way about nothing. And Zizine will die; I know she will die!'

'Who is Zizine?' exclaimed Sir Douglas at last, with a little impatience in his voice.

He was answered by the soft-eyed girl; grave, embarrassed, hesitating, with downcast lids. 'Zizine—Zizine—is a little Brazilian monkey, of which mamma is very fond.'

There was a moment's pause; and then she added, 'We are all fond of mamma's pet. Mr. Ross knows Zizine.'

And with the last words, trifling as they appeared, the melodious voice seemed to grow severe, and the eyes that had been so timid turned so full and pained a look of reproach at Kenneth, that Sir Douglas was positively startled.

Not so Kenneth, whose repressed smile broke into a little mocking laugh. 'Yes, I do know Zizine; and I will introduce her to my uncle, or, to speak more respectfully, I will introduce my uncle to her;' and if she does not snap his fingers off, he shall feed and caress her, and console her for Antonio's obduracy.'

'Oh, Mr. Ross,' whimpered Lady Charlotte, 'how *can* you make a jest of anything so distressing? I am sure if your good uncle knew all! You are not aware, Sir Douglas, that this little creature—this precious little creature—will not eat unless fed by Antonio! It will not take food from any other hand; and what is to be done, if Antonio persists in leaving me, I am sure I don't know! I have been wretched about it all the morning!'

The shower of easy tears, after this last burst, seemed to clear off a little; and the possessor of Zizine listened with a ray (or a rainbow) of hope to Sir Douglas's assurances that a hungry monkey would take food from the most alien hand sooner than go without it; and even ventured to hint that the valued Antonio himself must originally have been a stranger to Zizine, since she was brought from the Brazils. A remark which seemed to make a profound impression on Lady Charlotte, who pronounced it to be 'so true; so very true—and—and so very comforting:' and she was quite surprised it had never occurred to her before. 'But you know, Sir Douglas—Columbus's egg—you know!' And on seeing rather a puzzled acquiescence in her new friend's face, she further explained herself by adding, 'What nobody thought of, till they saw it done, you know!' And with a tearful smile she gave a final flourish of the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, and settled herself for more cheerful discourse.

Then she listened with rapt attention to a number of little anecdotes told by Sir Douglas, of instinct and wisdom in animals, such as would be narrated to an intelligent child; and when he wound up with the tragic incident of the suicide from grief of a male marmoset, whose little mate dying on shipboard was thrown overboard; and told how, the very first day his cage was left accidentally open, the melancholy little survivor leaped over the ship's side at that identical spot, into the waves; and described the regret of all the sailors, who were of opinion that the ship should have been put about, though in wild weather, rather than that Jocko should have been allowed to perish,—Lady Charlotte vehemently exclaimed, 'Oh! I think so too—I think so too! How very cruel of the captain!'

And as she and her guests stepped forth into the garden and paced along the terrace, and through the pergola shaded with vines, she remarked to Kenneth that she had never seen a more pleasant or gentlemanly man than his uncle—'and so *travelled*, too!' which phrase she explained, like Columbus's egg, and said she meant that he knew so many things, which, of course, he had picked up going so much about the world as she understood he had done.

And Gertrude, too, praised Sir Douglas, even to himself! She was leaning against one of the square stone supports of the loggia; the vine-leaves with their tendrils dropping and curling round her uncovered head; pausing to let her companion admire the distant view of land and sea. 'It was very kind of you,' she said, 'to amuse mamma: it took away all her nervousness.'

Sir Douglas flushed a little. It was very pleasant being spoken to in such a friendly tone by this pretty girl; and he was rather shy, though his shyness was not awkward, like his friend Lorimer Boyd's.

'I was glad to amuse her. But you must not be angry with Kenneth for laughing a little: I had no idea it was a monkey that Lady Charlotte was so anxious about when I first saw her distress.'

Gertrude shrank a little further from her companion, and spoke in a low voice.

'I know. I was not exactly angry; but it vexed me. Mamma is not—you will see at once that she is not—one of those clever women with strong nerves, who do nothing that any one can smile at. I know mamma is not clever; but she is good and tender; she is tender to all she loves; and she is tender to all creatures—birds, and pets of all kinds. My poor father used to give them to her. He died of consumption; and he used to have them in his room. It is true he did not give her Zizine, but mamma has the habit of loving these things extremely—and—and I cannot bear that any one should seem almost to jest at her vexation!'

She trembled a little as she spoke; but that trembling—like the *tremolo* in her clear, rich singing—gave no impression of weakness; and the touch of sternness was in her voice again at the final phrase, as it had been when she said that Kenneth 'knew Zizine.' Sir Douglas liked her for it. He liked the protection given by her own child to this sacred, silly woman: sacred as a parent, even where weakness could not but be perceptible; sacred, for the sake of duty, and for the sake of scenes replete with sadness and reverent associations;—not to be laughed at by mocking lips; to be pitied; to be tenderly dealt with, even as she dealt, or was supposed to deal, with others. He felt that had he been the son of a silly mother, he also would have dealt so by her; and his own mother's half-remembered, half-forgotten face vaguely rose again to memory in presence of this girl, as it had done the evening before—leaving the impression, as it did then, that Gertrude Skifton 'had a look of her about the eyes.' Dear eyes, that bent over his cradle, and were lifted to heaven when he first learned to pray; and shone for a little way on

in his childhood, and then vanished,—leaving in those childish years such a comfortable blank of love !

When he left the Villa Mandóro with Kenneth, they walked a little way in silence ; then Kenneth said, laughing, ‘ Well, we had a fine scene there ! That woman is an incarnation of folly ; but the girl is very nice.’

‘ Yes, the girl is nice,’ assented Sir Douglas.

‘ I’m glad you like her,’ said Kenneth, carelessly ; ‘ for they are the only people (of your sort) I care to see here ; and your friend, Lorimer Boyd, is in and out of their house like a tame dog. When he ain’t in the Chancellerie you may look for him in the Villa Mandóro. I believe he means to take Lady Charlotte in hand, according to the advertisements, “ To Ladies of Neglected Education.” He comes in like a tutor, with plans of Herculaneum, and drawings of Pompeian pottery, and tickets to see this, that, and the other, with most desperate industry.’

‘ And does Lady Charlotte respond ?’

‘ Well, not unless some magnates are to accompany her. Her whole soul (if she has a soul) seems to be occupied with the ambition of being always in a certain “ set,” wherever she goes. She is always triumphing in being invited, or lamenting that she and her daughter are “ left out,” or setting some little wheel in motion to “ get asked ” somewhere. I believe she tolerates Lorimer Boyd (to whom she always listens with a stifled yawn) only as the well-spring and fountain of introductions she would not otherwise obtain in this place. She dines constantly at the English Legation, and goes to balls at the Neapolitan Court, and knows all the Principessas, Duchessas, Contessas, and Contessinas that rattle their carriages up and down the Chiaja ; and if the whole government were subverted (as it certainly will be one of these days), it is my belief that she would transfer her allegiance and her visiting-cards to whatever potentates floated on the surface, and to whatever dynasty happened to reign.’

‘ Well, it is an odd mania in a woman holding a certain and established rank herself, in her own country ; but when you know more of the world, Kenneth, you won’t think it so very uncommon.’

‘ Are they rich ?’

‘ Yes, I think they are. I believe ’ (and here Kenneth hesitated a little)—‘ I believe the daughter has an independent fortune ; and her mother is bent on marrying her to some foreign grandee. She very nearly managed it with one of the Roman Colonnas, or some

such great family, before they came here; but his family wouldn't hear of it, the young lady being a Protestant.'

'I wonder Lady Charlotte would think of such a marriage!'

'Think of it! I assure you she clung to it as if she were drowning; and as to the religious part of the difficulty, she said she really had hoped better things from the confessor of the family, who seemed such a *suave*, well-mannered, sociable man, than to oppose himself to her daughter; and she was sure Gertrude would not object to listen "occasionally" to his exhortations, or even to go "now and then, with her husband the prince," to the great Church festivals; "but not as a customary thing; of course they could not expect that." I really do think there never was such a goose born, as that woman!'

If Sir Douglas thought his conceited nephew severe, he did not find his rational friend, Lorimer Boyd, a whit more indulgent with respect to his new associates. All the craving after fine acquaintance and frivolous gaieties, and all the insane planning about her daughter, was confirmed in his report. 'And the worst of it is,' concluded Lorimer gloomily, 'that she was once a great beauty.'

Sir Douglas laughed. 'How does that add to her offence?'

'By adding to her folly. She has all the *minauderics* and airs of a silly beautiful girl, being now but a silly elderly woman. I could box her ears when I see her drooping her faded thin little cheek to her skeleton shoulder; with a long ringlet of heaven-knows-who's hair in the fashion of a lovelock, trailing over her scragginess. She always reminds me of some figure in Holbein's "Dance of Death." A most preposterous woman.'

'Her daughter seems very different, and very fond of her, Lorimer. There must be some good in her, depend upon it.'

'I suppose there is *some* good in every one. Her daughter—well! we see what bright freshness of vegetation springs up in tropic dust; what flowers burst through the crevices of those hot, barren walls. Poor child, half her time is spent in endeavouring not to seem ashamed of her mother!'

'No; she loves her mother,' exclaimed Sir Douglas, eagerly.

'She must have a great deal of love to spare,' said Lorimer Boyd, with something between a sigh and a sneer; 'and if it be so, it says much for the daughter, but nothing for the mother. Gertrude Skifton is like her father. I knew him: he died here. A man to love and to remember.'

'Well, you must not dispute with my wise uncle,' laughed

Kenneth, 'for he sets up to know more of these people in two days, than those who have sat,—as we have,—for two months, within hail of Lady Charlotte's one ringlet almost every evening.'

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ACQUAINTANCE RIPENS.

ALMOST every evening! It is astonishing how rapidly intimacy progresses in country-houses, sea-side gatherings, and the small society of compatriots in a foreign town. If you know each other at all, it is almost impossible not to be what is called 'intimate;' even though that degree of familiarity may lessen, or cease altogether, when the circumstances which produce it are altered; and when persons who were 'great friends' at Rome, Naples, or Florence, choose to drop into being civil acquaintances, after they once more carelessly congregate with the herding swarms of London.

Lady Charlotte and her daughter Gertrude were the chief stars at Naples of many a pic-nic party and ball. Not that Gertrude was a great beauty, or her mother a wise woman, as we have seen; but because they were among the few well-connected English then in Naples; and the 'set,'—as Lady Charlotte called it,—with the addition of what was best of the 'foreign set,' mingled and met nearly every day in pursuit of the same aim—pleasure. The English are said to hold aloof from each other abroad; and there is a humorous passage at the opening of Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey,' where he represents himself as meeting with a gentleman-like and conversible person, of whose chance companionship he was about to avail himself, but, *finding he was a compatriot*, he retired to his own room.

Whatever may have been the case in Sterne's time, it is certain that the disposition now is rather the reverse. And though we hear of ladies in India, and officers' wives in regiments on foreign service, 'flouting' each other in their own small circle: and, in colonial society, of ladies whom 'nobody in the colony visits:' and everywhere of the various little monkey-copyings of exclusiveness, performed by the Zizines who give themselves airs abroad—'captains' ladies,' and 'majors' ladies,' 'colonels' ladies,' and 'governors' ladies;' and 'white ladies' who won't associate with 'brown ladies;' and Creoles, and Mestizas, and all sorts of other distinctions

unknown to the great European family—yet, in a general way, the English are a sociable nation ; and, beyond a certain cautious shyness as to the ‘respectability’ of new acquaintances, there is no reluctance to come together.

But Lady Charlotte was of Scotch extraction, and the Scotch are yet more willing to ‘foregather,’ as it is called, provided it be with their ‘own folk.’ They are a scantier population than the English, with a scantier aristocracy and gentry. The tide of commercial success has not yet so flooded in among them (though it is fast advancing) as it has amongst the English ; sweeping away old feudal memories and landmarks. They know all about each other’s families and ‘forbears,’ down to the twentieth degree of cousinhood ; and both rich and poor, high and low, genteel and ungenteel, set a value on rank and connexion far beyond the value set upon it in England, and set a value on their own nationality, which is a feeling distinct and apart. ‘Come of gude Scotch bluid’ is a far greater recommendation among them, than ‘come of a good old county family’ is among the Southrons ; and when that ‘gude stock’ is also noble, the respect is unbounded. That

‘Caledonia, stern and wild,’

which made so rough a nurse to poetic Burns, admits, *as a theory*, his noble line—

‘A man’s a man for a’ that ;’

but, as a matter of practice, it is certain that if her wayward gauger had been a lord—if he had been a duke—if he had even been a laird—‘Burns of Burndyke’—she would not have delayed the opportunity to *fêter* his genius till it became a centenary festival !

Lady Charlotte was a Scotchwoman ; and she was glad to meet Lorimer Boyd and friends ‘from the North.’ She had even sought to establish a cousinhood between herself and Lorimer on the strength of some intermarriage between the Clochnabens and her own family in very remote times. And, at all events, she held him bound and responsible for her destiny in Naples ; for fit introductions and pleasant days. He had been very kind, she said, when Mr. Skifton was dying ; ‘read to him, and that sort of thing ;’ and very sorry for her and her daughter. That was more than two years ago now ; and the grief for Mr. Skifton had begun to be wiped off the china slate of his widow’s memory. She had not been a bad wife to him. Always very gentle ; always very attentive when he was particularly ill ; very sorry when he died. She wept very much

the first time she saw her daughter in mourning, and when she was trying on her own weeds. Indeed, 'for a long time afterwards,' as she impressed upon Gertrude, 'she could not bear the sight of black crape,' it 'always brought the tears into her eyes, let her meet it where she would.' But she was now beginning to be very cheerful and comfortable again; and had none of that depth of nature which, she observed, caused 'a mere nothing' suddenly to 'overcome that dear girl by reminding her of her poor father.'

She was anxious, too, about Gertrude. She wished her to marry early, and marry well; and she was all the more uneasy about invitations and opportunities, on account of various past circumstances connected with the long weary illness and climate-seeking days that had removed her from general society and 'seasons' in London, where she had once been so much admired. And then, after she was left a widow, Gertrude had a bad cough; and was supposed to be threatened with the same complaint as her father; and she was advised to pass 'a couple more winters in Italy' to recruit her strength; and beyond and besides all this, there was the patent fact that her marriage with Mr. Skifton had rather put her out of that 'set' to which it was her great aim to belong. It had been a love-match; a love-match not repented of by either party, and extremely advantageous in point of fortune to Lady Charlotte, who had none. But, then, who *was* Mr. Skifton? He had every merit a man could have; but he did *not* come of a 'good old stock,' or of any known family. He was handsome, rich, elegant in manner, and singularly accomplished; but the careless question elicited by the news of his decease and Lady Charlotte's consequent widowhood, of 'By-the-bye, who the deuce *was* Skifton?' produced only the vague reply, 'Well, I really don't know; I believe he was a very good sort of fellow. His father was a merchant, or a broker, or something; and his daughter will have money.'

A little soreness consequent on his position, and a wavering puzzled notion that such circumstances had weighed more with her recalcitrant foreign grandees than Gertrude's religion, troubled Lady Charlotte's mind. She had been rather humbled and annoyed at the escape from her very simple web of the young Colonna; and previous to Sir Douglas's arrival she had already been occupying herself with little fooleries and flatteries to Kenneth, who, *faute de mieux*, would, she thought, make a good husband for Gertie (in *her* view of a good husband), being well off himself and heir to Old Sir Douglas. Her efforts however, being confined to what chaperons call 'bringing the young people together,' and the encouragement

of much singing of Scotch ballads in alternation with more cultivated music, she did neither good nor harm; and that is more than can be said of the majority of match-making or match-hoping mothers.

Neither was she, in fact, very anxious about it; for, after all, either here or elsewhere, some great duke, prince, or count, might suddenly fall in love with her daughter; and she *might* wish that instead of Mr. Ross; and it would be very embarrassing to have to 'throw over' Kenneth, and not very ladylike.

So things were suffered to take pretty much their own course; and a very pleasant course it was for all parties. Lorimer Boyd was as friendly as possible, and Kenneth exceedingly attentive, though now and then he teased Lady Charlotte by little mockeries and *persiflage* which she only half understood, and feebly rebutted; and Sir Douglas, 'in his way' was charming too. Lady Charlotte took great pains to please him; and never felt uneasy with him as she did occasionally with his nephew. She had just prudence enough 'in case it ever came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie,' to avoid all allusion to her knowledge that the nephew was thought very wild. It would be very foolish to set his rich uncle against him, and *all* young men ran a little wild at his age, and abroad. And she used to try a little feeble flattery with Sir Douglas—her head very much to one side, and her slender fingers twirling that long young ringlet which she had made sole inheritor of her own departed love-locks, and which kept Lorimer Boyd in a chronic state of dissatisfaction. Modulating her voice to a sort of singing whisper, like a canary-bird at sunset, she ventured little hints of admiration as to his looks; and how he must 'have been' much handsomer than Kenneth; and she bantered him about his 'dreadful bravery' and his probable relationship to the 'Parliament Captain,' the Ross of 1650, and talked of the taking of Montrose, and made Gertrude repeat a stanza that she 'saw in an old book, but what book it was, had gone out of her poor head,'—

'Leslie for the kirk,
And Middleton for the king;
But de'il a man cau gie a knock
But Ross and Augustine!'

But it was when Brazilian Zizine fell ill ('like a fellow-creature,' as Lady Charlotte expressed it) that Sir Douglas's favour rose to its climax! He actually gravely inspected Zizine; he brought remedies, and seemed to pity the little dumb beast; and he talked to Gertrude of its 'plaintive captive eyes,' while he fed it. And Lady

Charlotte was overheard saying of him, in most unintelligible Italian to the Contessa Rufo, that 'Avendo potuto essere uno generale, nondimeno aveva guarito Zizine!' on which the pretty Contessa, with a warm Southern smile, pronounced Sir Douglas to be 'tanto amabile!' though she had not the remotest idea what meaning her friend wished to convey, or what the possibility of his becoming a general had to do with his feeding a monkey.

His tenderness, however, to Zizine, was not all. He amused Lady Charlotte; who declared that talking to him was 'like sitting with the Arabian Nights.' 'No, Mr. Kenneth need not laugh; for of course she did not mean that she could sit with the Arabian, Nights,—or with any other stories; but he knew well enough that what she really meant was, that his uncle told them so many pleasant things.' She had daily driven up and down the Chiaja till she was weary, and daily inspected what Gertrude called the 'play-things' at their pretty villa: playthings of which all Italians are very fond. Strange slender bridges over artificial streamlets; garden traps that when trodden on send a sprinkling shower over the head of the startled visitor; grottoes, and gilt gazebos, and Chinese summer houses, and thatched rustic lodges. But she had not seen the graver sights of Naples, as a dowager who had more acquaintance with history or even with Murray's guide-books might have done: so that much novelty cropped and budded out of the old places, in consequence of being with the new companionable friend.

People see things under such different aspects! When Stendahl published his 'Rome, Naples, and Florence, in 1817,' all that he chose to describe in his opening pages—whether the better to mask subsequent expressions of political opinions, or from any other motive—was the eagerness with which he flew to the theatres, and what operas were performed at the various cities he visited during his tour. His account of his first entrance into Milan is, that he immediately went to *La Scala*; and his description of Naples is confined to the fact, that San Carlo being shut, he rushed to the Fiorentini. He mentions that 'two play-houses have been discovered at Pompeii, and a third at Herculaneum;' and as to the beauties of nature he disposes of them in his diary thus:—'25 .Février. Je reviens de Pæstum. *Route pittoresque.*'

An English lady who had arrived by sea at Lisbon sent her coachman and lady's maid to amuse themselves with the sights of the new foreign city. The coachman returned filled with melancholy contempt for the inferior 'turn out' of the Portuguese nobility as to carriages and harness: the lady's maid said she (like Stendahl)

had been to the opera, and thought the ladies' necks were in general far too short (though they wore some fine necklaces), and that their inclination to *embonpoint* was very remarkable; figures, indeed, that she 'would have no pleasure in dressing.'

Sir Douglas's mode of seeing Naples might be no better than that of his neighbours, but it had the merit of entertaining Lady Charlotte Skifton. He was full of 'historical gossip;' to which she used to listen most attentively, pulling the young ringlet nearly straight, and looking round as if she vaguely expected to see the people and events he conjured up. She 'could not eat her dinner' for thinking of young Conradin—titular king of Sicily from the time he was two years old till he was sixteen,—and then (at that boyish age!) led out to execution in the market-place with his uncle Frederic of Austria; Pope Urban having aided Charles of Anjou to defeat and take him prisoner. She implicitly believed the doubtful story of his mother sailing into the Bay of Naples with black sails to her ships, and untold treasure as ransom, too late to rescue her murdered and courageous boy. She was 'afraid she was almost glad' at the increased hatred of the French which that execution inspired, till in the rolling course of years, at a certain Easter, 1282, every Frenchman in Sicily, except one, was murdered.

She thought Queen Joanna's conduct 'really now so *very* abominable,' twisting a silk cord of variegated colours, and answering her inquisitive husband that it was 'to strangle him with,' so playfully that he believed she was joking till the horrible threat came true. She was delighted to hear that Queen Joanna was herself smothered afterwards, after many more years of crime, and she looked at the dark, gaping windows of her ruined palace in the Bay, with awe and satisfaction.

As to Massaniello, and his rebellion and brief triumph—she said she 'knew all about *him*'—except that the people had sewed his head again to his body, and obliged the Government to give him a state burial after his downfall and massacre—'because she had seen the opera of Massaniello several times: only in the opera there was nothing about what happened after he was killed.'

Newer to her was the hanging of Admiral Caraccioli (that blot upon the fame of Nelson!), and the well attested story of the body of the Italian admiral floating upright, to the consternation of the sailors, in the wake of Nelson's ship, from the imperfect weighting down of the corpse when flung into the sea.

Her interest as to the disputed fact whether Pozzuoli was the place where St. Paul landed, was weak to the absorbed attention

with which she devoured the details of the murder of Agrippina by order of her own son, the Emperor Nero. The picture of this proud, profligate, energetic old woman, betrayed into a galley contrived like those in the time of the French *Noyades*, to give way and sink under her,—her escape, after being hit on the head by a slave with an oar; her floating, swimming, and struggling, to the shore at Baiæ, and being taken to her own Lucrine villa only to be afterwards assassinated in her bed there,—had a fascination not unmixed with a sensation of terror, for Lady Charlotte,—moving her to observe that it was impossible for her to hear such a story, in the very place where it had happened, without being thankful no one could put *her* ‘on board a boat that was all to crack and come to pieces,’ or come and kill her at the Villa Mandorlo ‘only because somebody else had ordered it.’

And in and out of the bays and creeks she sailed with Old Sir Douglas, feeling more at her ease, and more entertained, than she had ever done with any stranger before.

CHAPTER VII.

FAST YOUNG MEN.

SWIFTLY such days passed on; and it became almost a usual ceremony in the little circle to end each day with ‘What shall we do to-morrow?’ When Sir Douglas first arrived, indeed, there had been grave talk of instant departure; of breaking up bad habits by removing Kenneth from scenes of idle temptation; and of all sorts of reforming and repressive measures. But it is not so easy to move a full-fledged young gentleman of Kenneth’s disposition, from a place that happens to hit his fancy. His uncle’s arrival, if not followed by any very real reform of conduct, had certainly secured greater decency; and he bore with patience (or comparative patience) the brief anxious lectures which followed the examination of very complicated and uncertain calculations, as to general debts; and debts of ‘honour;’ loans made (half from careless generosity, half from vanity) to idle young foreigners, who had no earthly claim upon his assistance; jewellery squandered on their female associates; and all the embarrassments from which,—had he probed his own heart for the truth,—he expected to be relieved by the very simple expedient of getting his uncle to ‘pay them off.’

Nothing is more curious, in these cases of extravagance, than the puppy-blindness which does not see,—in that first stage of manhood,—that if such debts are ‘paid off’ by some relative or friend,—the items of which they were composed were acts of meanness, and not acts of generosity. If the phrases usual on such occasions were put into the language of the pleasant old story of the ‘Palais de la Verité,’—where people said not what they intended to say, but spoke the ‘naked truth,’—how very extraordinary those sentences would sound!

Conceive a man addressing his friend thus :—

‘My dear fellow, certainly, I will lend you a couple of hundreds. I’ll give you all my three sisters’ music-lessons, new dresses, and jaunts to the sea-side for this year. And there’s pale little Fanny, who costs my mother a good deal in physician’s advice. I’ll give you all her doctor’s fees for six months or so, and she shall go without. I would not be so stingy as to refuse a friend such a paltry sum as you have asked of me,—no, not for the world.’

Such language may sound startling and absurd; but it is a true paraphrase and reduction of the flourish of words in which similar boastful offers are made by young men to the greedy companions of their follies. Neither borrower nor lender appear the least conscious that the fund they draw upon consists of what they can *crib* from others.

So much for a specimen of lending to a friend. Here is the liberal gift to a lady :—

‘I made little Justerini the dancer such a splendid present last Christmas! I gave her three years of my fat old father’s plodding work as head-clerk with Tighthenall & Co. ! He’s getting old, you know : drowsy of an evening : tired out, in fact : had rather a hard life of it ; a good many of us to provide for. But I was determined I’d give her the earrings. I’d have given double,—ay, six years of his hard-earned salary, sooner than not have behaved handsomely to her about them ! *Such a darling, that girl is !*’

Are there not many old gentlemen who still plod on for their families, when they would fain rest—and ought to rest—who can endorse the truth of this translation ?

Then there is the ‘free and open-handed’ young man, who will go ‘share and share alike’ in anything, from a Greenwich dinner to a Newmarket cottage. *He speaks :—*

‘I can’t stand a fellow refusing his chum such a paltry favour as belonging to a club, or sharing a yacht, or taking half an opera-box with him. I know I didn’t hesitate a minute when Tom Osprey asked *me*. I gave him my mother’s carriage-horses, and little Sam’s favourite pony, and my father’s hunters, and that box at

Twickenham where they used to go for change of air in summer,—before Tom had half done explaining about it. *I'm* not one of your backward fellows. I always come forward like a man; when a friend wants anything.'

Or thus; liberal only to Self, instead of Self & Co.

'I always say there are certain things a fellow can't do without. *Must* make a certain figure, and have certain comforts. *I* like to enjoy life; and see other fellows enjoy it. Life is not worth having if you don't put some pleasure into it! I was obliged to have all my old grandmother's sables and shawls last winter—(you know she brought me up; my mother was too poor to do it);—besides the marriage-portion she had put by for my Cousin Bessie. Couldn't do without, I assure you; not, at least, so as to live like a gentleman. Can't see why Cousin Bessie should be in any hurry about marrying; or why the confounded prig she's engaged to, makes such a point of what he calls "mutual means of support." All I know is, I couldn't do without her portion and grandmother's Indian shawls and Russian sables; that's fact.'

Or even thus. Among a set where shawls, and sables, and marriage-portions, are alike unknown.

'You say you wonder, because I'm a poor curate's son, how I can get on at college? That's all you know about it! Of course it is difficult; and I'm put to it to give wine-parties and so forth, like other fellows—but it's to be done with proper management. If I take six days in the week butcher's meat that my brothers and sisters would eat; and all the coals and blankets the old women in the village used to get,—and my father's two glasses of port-wine which my mother fancied kept his throat from relaxing for Sunday duty,—and a year or two of Dick's schooling, (who scarcely needs it, for my father gives him all his spare time, and he's a sharp fellow by nature), it comes to a good lump of money in the end; and, if there's still some debt left, I've no doubt I can grind it out of them sooner than seem shabby to these fellows at Oxford.'

Ah! how many a true tragedy lies under this apparent farce of words! How many a 'fine-spirited young gentleman, very free with his money,' steps out of his hotel in the sight of admiring waiters, drawing on a pair of straw-coloured gloves in preparation for a day's pleasure—tossing double his real fare to the cabman to be driven rapidly to the place of rendezvous; and then talks to the boon-companions he joins, it may be, of poachers on his father's estate; of some servant of his own, turned away as an idle vagabond and a thief for taking his master's cigars and silk-handker-

chiefs ; of 'being regularly swindled out of his money' by some Bond Street jeweller, who according to custom has sold him a set of studs and a gold ring for treble their real value ; but to whom it never once occurs that the *tu quoque* of these various accusations would be his own just due !

That he, also, is an idle vagabond, living on what he never earned ; a 'poacher' on the better means of better men ;—a 'swindler' in the acquirement of things unpaid for, or the profitable interest on which is lost, in the uncertainty and delay of payment ;—yea, it may be, a most daring 'ROBBER,' whose 'stand and deliver' threatens even more than the lives of those whose substance has to be surrendered to him ; since it threatens disgrace and ruin to himself (and through him to all connected with him) if they do not suffer themselves to be stripped of their goods, and consent to the extremity of sacrifice !

And fathers may toil, and mothers may darn, and many a Bessie pine, and many a Fanny sicken for sea-air, and many a little Dick lose his schooling : and so long as the cause of all these troubles does not actually pick pockets in the streets ; or garotte unwary passengers on the highways and byeways where business or pleasure calls him ; he contentedly believes himself to be living the life of 'a gentleman and an honest man,' and would knock the offender down who dared to dispute that position.

Kenneth Ross doubted as little of his title to be thought 'a thorough gentleman,' as others of his creed. And yet it is certain that he expected his friends, his tradesmen, his gambling debts, and his follies, to be paid for out of his uncle's money ; was perfectly content that all his vicarious acts of generosity should (like his debts) be set down to his own credit, but in truth be provided for by this other man ; and had never given a single thought as to what his situation, or the situation of his motley crowd of creditors would be, should his own means fall short, and his uncle, wearied out at last, refuse to supply the deficit.

But why should he give it a thought ? Was he not his uncle's heir ? He knew he was to be his heir. At least he had always expected it, ever since he was a child ; and he believed Sir Douglas had always intended it.

Yes, Sir Douglas certainly *had* intended it. Up to a certain evening—the evening of a day of glory and beauty and sunshine spent in an expedition to Sorrento—he had intended it ; though he did not know that Kenneth built upon it. And the first night which saw him waver in such intentions, saw him also wakeful, weary, and

tender ; full of yearnings to his nephew ; and occupied even until early dawn with anxious repetitions in his own mind of wise counsel and explanation ; though both counsel and explanation were to make it clear to Ross of Torrieburn, that Ross of Glenrossie was assisting him for the last time !

The worst of it was, that Torrieburn's past experience was very much against any settled belief in such a declaration as to Glenrossie's future proceedings.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY AT SORRENTO.

As the lovely Italian spring advanced, the question, ' What shall we do to-morrow ? ' was answered more and more boldly ; and the little intimate circle that had mingled with royal balls, and musical routs, during more wintry weather (for even Naples has its winter) ; and whose members had availed themselves of Italian hospitalities ; began to draw more and more together ; seeking, as strangers naturally would, their chief pleasure in excursions among scenes the beauty of which will for ever be described in vain in guide-books, itineraries, and travels,—since not all the glowing words that ever were strung together can convey a hundredth part of the impression made on the senses by actual experience. It is a favourite phrase with poets, that we should ' conjure up a vision ' of such and such objects ; but no magic can conjure up, to one who has never yet beheld Southern Italy, the sudden irradiation of our common world that takes place. It is the nature we always knew—but it is nature illuminated ! Colour is deeper and brighter, seas are more dazzling, sunrise and sunset are inconceivably richer, mountains have gradations of purple which no pencil can translate. The wasteful wealth of fruit and flowers sets us dreaming of Eden, instead of our digging and delving climes ; and the very people who dwell in these favoured regions seem endowed with a quicker life. Eyes have a depth of shining, and teeth a glitter in smiling, and cheeks a warmth of glowing, that the north can never show. Like Wilson's cloud, in the Isle of Palms, of which he says—

' E'en in its very motion there was rest,'

even in their very indolence there is passion ! And that *dolce far niente*, of which we hear so much and understand so little, is more

like the tranquillity of their own slumbering volcanoes, than the settled calm which alone among us would produce it. Or—to take the less grandiose simile of Lorimer Boyd in discussing the subject with Sir Douglas—it is the difference between the contented grazing of the bovine race, and the sleek and sleepy yawning of the hunting leopard. There is real quiet in the one; there is only temporary inaction in the other.

And though the simile might not be over complimentary, Lorimer Boyd loved the Italians. He praised their simplicity; the absence of affectation, the loving nature of their women. He denied the inferiority of their men. He held that all of best and brightest in Europe came originally from Italy. He counted over the roll of the old heroic names, and came down, with an excuse for every blotted entry in history, to those later times when even her artists had fought as soldiers, and her priests governed as statesmen. He would not admit, without opposition, even Sir Douglas's censure of the Neapolitan nobility. What could be expected of men who were only too well aware that Government had no feeling towards such as might be marked for distinction, but that of jealousy? Take away the occupation of literature and politics, freedom of action, and great landed interests, from the youthful nobility of Great Britain; take away their natural stake in the prosperity of their country; and what would remain, even for them, but the pursuit of pleasure, and the driving on of aimless days?

Besides, Naples was not Italy. In that often taken and retaken town, there was scarcely a nation whose blood did not mingle with the original race. French and Spanish, German and English, Greek, and even Turkish currents are in those idle veins. And because Kenneth had found a set of profligates and gamblers there—as he could have found a set of idlers and gamblers in Paris or in London—was Sir Douglas to pass a sweeping judgment over the land, or attribute to the aristocracy of Naples any increase in his anxieties respecting his wayward nephew? As well might he consider it the fault of the fishermen in the islands of Ischia or Procida.

Those anxieties, however, were perpetually haunting Sir Douglas; so much so that once or twice he let fall a word respecting his hope that Kenneth 'would make creditable friendships' even to Gertrude—recurring eagerly to his own love, in youth and boyhood, for Lorimer Boyd.

And Gertrude looked grave, and said, 'I know what you feel. I had once a brother.'

Sir Douglas asked Lorimer about this brother. He had known them all. Did he resemble Gertrude?

'No. He was exactly like his most ridiculous mother, clothed in a tail-coat instead of female habiliments—if possible even more silly, more vain, and certainly less well-tempered; and it was anything but a subject of regret that he had pre-deceased his father, for he would have been a plague instead of a protection to his mother and sister.'

'How old do you suppose Miss Skifton may be? She is very grave and staid for a girl.'

'She is two-and-twenty. I know her age. And she has seen much of life and its cares even for those years.' And Lorimer Boyd sighed.

Sir Douglas mused on her tone and look when she said, 'I had once a brother;' and on a hundred other instances which impressed his memory, though they seemed mere nothings. There are persons who talk much and readily of their feelings, and who yet leave you in uncertainty both as to the sincerity and the motive of their confession; and there are others whose rare allusions to themselves and their private joys or sorrows seem to come like gleams of light, showing their whole inner nature.

Sir Douglas would have been at a loss to explain why the little he had ever gleaned from Gertrude Skifton respecting herself, had filled him with such intense sympathy and approval; such a conviction that her character was one of mingled gentleness and strength; fondness and girlish dignity; reserve and a subdued eagerness which pleased him better than all the open enthusiasm in the world!

He loved in her the cherishing of her foolish mother; the adoration for her dead father's memory; her easy courtesy to strangers; her sweet frank friendliness with those whom she acknowledged as intimates; with Kenneth, and Lorimer Boyd, and—himself. This last admission Sir Douglas made with a little hesitation. Her welcome to him was slyer than her welcome to them. Well, he would not have had it otherwise—she had not known him so long; and he remembered with pleasure the beautiful blush which overspread her face once when she said, 'I do not feel that you are so much of a stranger as I should; because Mr. Lorimer Boyd used to read your letters aloud sometimes, when you were in India, to my poor father; indeed, very often he used to read us one; my father enjoyed them so.'

The expression of her countenance was always lovely; lovely when her eyes were downcast (as indeed was habitual with her).

and lovely when she slowly raised them, as she did on this occasion, with a sort of innocent appeal in them, as though they said, 'I know I am blushing, but it is not for anything of which I need feel ashamed.'

He thought of her perpetually; and settled in his own mind that there was not in her one iota that he could wish to see altered, or that could be changed for the better.

And Lady Charlotte was quite pleased with his evident approval, for she felt 'if it ever came to anything between Kenneth Ross and Gertie,' here would be one great step gained for all subsequent arrangements.

And now they were to have one of their customary holidays, and spend the whole bright day at Sorrento: the little smiling Contessa Rufo, and a German couple, to whom she was 'doing the honours' of the sights of Naples, being the only strangers of the party.

Lady Charlotte got but one scanty story from Sir Douglas (the death of Panny, which she declared she had never heard before); and then she chatted with the Contessa, her companions being absorbed in the beauty of the moving panorama before them. They had left Naples at an hour unknown to indolent Londoners, and the early glory of morning yet fell on the tideless sea as they wound through the narrow roads surmounting the Bay of Castellamare; dotted with pointed white sails like wings, and showing on its rippled surface those strange dappled patches of green and purple which vary the blue of the ocean whenever it nears the shore.

Lovelier and lovelier grew the scene as they proceeded onwards. In odd nooks of the lofty cliffs, nestled houses as white as those distant sails; fruit-trees and vines surrounded them; gay foliage mantled the rocky ledges; and here and there the eye could rest on the glistening tops of thickly-planted orchards of orange and lemon-trees, looking like rounded domes of emerald, clustering far down in the hollows.

Fig-trees, with their broad black leaves, and vines in tender transparent green, mocked the grey volcanic ruggedness of the lofty rocks, as they came in sight of Sorrento. Little rude staircase-like paths struggled downwards to the caverns and coves of the beach, inviting the feet to explore them. Groups of fishermen, with women and children, loitered and basked here and there, clothed in those bright vestments in which all southern people delight. Now and then echoes of laughter, or the fragment of a simple song, came floating up on the air with that wonderful distinctness with which sounds are heard along a rocky shore,—airs which Gordigiani's

exquisite setting have since made famous; and which, perhaps, it required that composer's fine and sensitive taste to strip from their ruggedness as we strip off the shell of the almond, denuding the veiled melodies from nasal and husky tones, and sending them forth to the world full only of such gentle passion as breathes in the 'Bianco visin,' and the 'Tempo Passato;' familiar to us now from many a sweet and tutored voice even in our own land.

Lorimer Boyd had known Gordigiani's daughter. He described that sweet, ethereal creature to Gertrude: her large spiritual eyes, like the eyes we imagine those of a guardian angel; her smile, faint and tender as the serenest twilight; her pretty bashful pride in being able to compose words to her father's music. But she was gone—passed away like the echo of her own songs—taken in the early prime of her sweetness, scarcely living even to the time indicated by the poetic French epitaph written on one almost as lovely:—

‘Rose, elle a vécu ce que vivent les Roses,
L'espace d'un jour!’

They were still talking of this young Italian and her genius; and Sir Douglas was murmuring to himself the Scriptural words,—‘When the ear heard her, it blessed her,’—less with any thought of Gordigiani's angel-daughter, or a yet fitter reference to ‘works of necessity, piety, and charity,’ than in remembrance of the tremulous contralto of the English girl at his side,—when a wild shriek, followed by that wonderful amount of exclamatory appeals to Madonnas and Saints of different altars, common among the Italians, startled them into attention.

The carriages were to meet them at a given point, and they had been traversing part of their road upon mules; Gertrude riding by her mother, till they had paused to gaze at the town and beach; falling then a little into the rear with Lorimer and Sir Douglas while speaking of Gordigiani's music. The Rufos with their friends came next; and Kenneth and Lady Charlotte were a little in advance.

Lady Charlotte was high spirits, replying to Kenneth's constant *persiflage* with more *à plomb* than usual; pricking her mule from time to time with the coral points of her white silk parasol, and laughing foolishly like a school-girl at any little difficulties in the route. Presently the mule suddenly stopped. ‘Oh, you obstinacy, won't you take me on 'cause I'm such a giddy thing?’ giggled

the rider, giving a final prod at the mule's ear with the ornamental parasol.

The steel of the light parasol snapped; the sharp end entered the ear of the animal, which swerved, put its head down, and set off at a pace anything but safe or pleasant in poor Lady Charlotte's opinion. All the other mules, accustomed to act in concert with parties of sight-seers, set off at a like pace. Lady Charlotte screamed, the guides shouted, and a perfect Babel of voices sent up prayers to heaven for protection, mingled with curses of the poor beast on earth. Kenneth at first leaned back in his saddle in a fit of inextinguishable laughter at the ridicule of the whole scene. Fat Count Rufo, pulling in vain at the hard mouth of his *monture*, and bounding in his saddle like an india-rubber ball; his pretty countess laughing also, as she careered along, flying past Kenneth with her ankles much more exposed than at the decent commencement of her ride; the German couple, also at full speed, looking helplessly at each other as they fled together like the hapless pair in Burger's *Leonora*; and Lady Charlotte, the primary cause of all this erratic disturbance, making involuntary *soubresauts* on and off her frightened mule, such as are performed by light and nimble professionals for the entertainment of the audience at Astley's.

But all laughter was merged in fear when the mule made a false step on a path close to the precipice, that crumbled beneath its tread; then scrambled to recover its footing, unseating Lady Charlotte in the operation, and dragging her a few yards, pinned by many folds of careful shawling, and therefore utterly unable to extricate herself.

Before the sharp, bitter shriek from Gertrude had died thrilling on the air, the gentlemen of the party had reached the poor frightened woman, and rescued her from further danger. Sir Douglas had been first; leaping from his mule which he suffered to roam at large, and not attempting the dangerous experiment of riding after her. They were close to Sorrento; close to the Hotel di Tasso, where already rooms and refreshments had been ordered, in anticipation of their arrival. Lady Charlotte was easily carried there, and laid, half-fainting from fright and shock—but not otherwise the worse of her Mazeppa-like career—on a *chaise longue* in one of the bedrooms.

Kenneth helped to carry her in, and with a returning smile congratulated Gertrude on her mother's safety. Gertrude smiled too, vaguely, with a confused tearful look at Kenneth, in acknowledgment of being spoken to, rather than as hearing the exact words;

and then Kenneth Ross retreated, to compliment and re-assure pretty Countess Rufo, and Gertrude knelt down by her mother. Sir Douglas was still arranging pillows and shawls. If he had been waiting upon the venerable and unfortunate Queen Amélie of France, he could not have attended to her with more tender respect. He paused, and looked down on her as she lay. Gertrude's mother! That useless—ineestimable life! As he paused, the kneeling girl looked up at him; she voluntarily extended her hand to clasp his. 'Oh! I thank you so!' was all she said.

The warmth of the sun, when it glitters through rain in those warm southern climes when the rapid storms are over, and the red geranium and pale violet take glory from its rays—what was it to the warmth of Gertrude's eyes, shining through their haze of agitated tears! Her gaze thrilled the heart of him she addressed; his hand trembled as it pressed hers; that white hand with its modelled fingers—

'Lovely tapering less and less,'

whose graceful and nimble passage over the notes of the piano he had so often watched in the accompaniments to her welcome songs. He blessed her mentally for the eager movement which had so given it, warm and gloveless, into his cordial grasp; and whether after that sudden clasping it was dropped by him, or withdrawn by her, he was made too giddy by such contact to remember.

It must have been withdrawn; for one spectator, whom both had forgotten—Lorimer Boyd—passed *his* hand over his brow with a sense of pain, and muttered—'She is in love with Douglas!'

In love. For no girl 'in love' would leave her hand to be clasped, as friendship only, with its firm light satisfied hold, should clasp it,—if that electric thrill which flashes love's messages from heart to heart told her she either loved or was beloved. Let us then believe, for Sir Douglas's sake, that the white hand was withdrawn, and that the trembling downcast look with which Gertrude listened to his further reassurances (made in rather a different voice from usual), as to Lady Charlotte's condition, resulted rather from tender embarrassment than from any lingering misgivings as to her mother's danger.

Lady Charlotte had indeed sustained no hurt. Her extreme fragility and slenderness had caused her to fall so lightly, that not a bruise was discoverable beyond a little abrasion on one of her wrists; and the quantity of soft shawls of very rich texture, slipping with her as she fell, made a sort of cradle for her head and shoulders

during the brief interval of risk, when she was dragged along the path by the rocks.

‘But it *might* have been very serious; I *might* even have been killed, mightn’t I?’ she repeated over and over again, not without a little feeling of pleasure at having been the heroine of so dangerous an adventure. And as often as Gertrude assented, and pressed her lips on the faded face, with—‘It might, indeed, my poor little mother!’ so often did Lady Charlotte, with a sort of cooing murmur of pity for herself, assiduously smooth and twine round her finger the ringlet, which had been made terribly dusty and unsightly during the *cullute* of its possessor, and had required more than ordinary care to restore it to form and brightness.

The Hotel di Tasso overhangs the sea, and on that side at least there is comparative silence. Lady Charlotte, therefore, wearied by her inauspicious ride, and lulled by the sound of gently-lapping waves far beneath the windows, and by the heat of the afternoon sun, carefully as it was shut and shaded from her, soon fell fast asleep. For a short interval Sir Douglas and Gertrude remained motionless, listening to her measured slumberous breathings. Then he proposed to her daughter to come out, to join the rest of the party, who had already braved both heat and fatigue, and clambered to the Capo di Sorrento: and they sallied forth, not unwilling to enjoy their walk according to the implication conveyed in that sweet Irishism, ‘alone together,’ the ‘*presque seule*’ of the pretty French widow, who was asked if she was going ‘alone’ into the country.

And now all again was gladness, and all again was bloom and beauty; wild flowers sparkled along the shore, even to the very verge of Neptune’s domain. On the lovely headland grew tufted patches of myrtle, and the tall pointed white heather which gleams like the ghost of some unknown harvest of another world. Down in the dreamland, under the far-away sea, lay shifting shadows of broken white fragments, which are held to be (and why should we churlishly doubt it?) remnants of palaces and temples over which the waters have closed, as over O’Donoghue and his white horse and valiant retainers in our own island of fairy traditions. Fatigue was unfelt; that air of which the elder Tasso spoke—

‘Si vitale, che gl’ uomini che senza provar,
Altro cielo ci vivono, sono quasi immortali,’ *

fanned their faces, and made the very act of breathing a pleasure!

* So pure, that whoso there hath had his birth,
Lives half immortal, even upon earth.

‘Up the heather mountain and down the craggy brae,’

undesiring of further rest than frequent pauses to take their fill of grazing,—or to listen laughingly to some pretty peasant, some distaff-spinning matron, some bouquet-giving child, all vainly endeavouring to explain in their curious *patois*, requests to the sight-seers which resolved themselves most distinctly into an unromantic act of mendicancy,—the gay party reunited on their homeward course: and arrived at the hotel to find Lady Charlotte alert and recovered; only too willing to hear from Sir Douglas the mournful romance of the poet Tasso’s mad love for the high-born princess whose ducal brother had him imprisoned in darkness and solitude, to expiate his presumption; and his miserable return, after insane and wretched years, to his sister and the old half-forgotten home,—now only an hotel.

And when that romance in prose was ended, Countess Rufo’s German friend repeated Schiller’s wonderful ballad of ‘The Diver:’ and his wife sang one of the sweet wild songs, whose harmonies are indeed ‘songs without words.’ And after that, on low pleading from Sir Douglas, and urging from all the rest, Gertrude sang.

Some irresistible fancy of the moment urged Sir Douglas to inquire if she had ever heard the ballad of which he recollected the one verse of farewell, as sung by his mother. Yes, she knew it; but even she could not recollect all the words. She did not think it was a complete ballad, but an old fragment of a song of exile; not, she said, from a ‘foreign’ shore, as Sir Douglas had it, but the ‘Irish shore;’ and without further preface she began it, in the clear rich voice he loved so to hear.

And while they listened, the day departed, and the moon fell on the unruffled sea where the fisherman’s tiny barks flashed gleaming for a moment, and turned their sails again to shadow. The mountains rose beyond, dark and majestic; and the huge form of Vesuvius slept, unlit by its fiery torch, in the white light of the moon. The oars ceased to sound; the voices from the shore became less frequent; the very waves seemed to come more and more softly to the sands, till at length there seemed but one sound left on earth—Gertrude’s voice!

That broken fragment of a song is in many an old collection:—

‘A lightsome heart, a soldier’s rïen,
And a feather of the blue,
Were all of me you knew, dear love,
Were all of me you knew!

'Now all is done that man can do,
And all is done in vain ;
My love, my native land, adieu,
For we ne'er can meet again.'

He turned him round, and right about,
All on the Irish shore ;
He gave his bridle reins a shake,
With ' Adieu for evermore, my love,
Adieu for evermore !' *

The tender tremulousness of the last line, and the beauty of her face looking dreamily out over the sea as she sang, melted the heart of more than one of her listeners. But no one spoke to her of her song except Sir Douglas, and he said to her in a choked passionate voice,—

'If I thought it were "adieu for evermore" between us, in lieu of a sweet sorrowful dream—I should go mad !'

It was a declaration of love, like any other ; or unlike any other, for no two declarations of love are alike ; any more than two leaves on a tree, or human faces, or voices, or even the handwriting of two different persons, can be alike.

And though Kenneth, and Lorimer Boyd, and Count Rufo, and the ladies of that happy party, all spoke to Gertrude afterwards, she could not have told what had fallen from any of them, except that at last she heard her mother say, in her softest canary-bird voice—

'Well, and what shall we do to-morrow ?'

And Sir Douglas answered,—

'I have business in the morning ; but late in the day we might go to Amalfi, and stay a day or two there.'

CHAPTER IX.

A LIFE OF PLEASURE.

BUSINESS in the morning. That special morning had long been dedicated to the final examination and arrangement of Kenneth's difficulties, at least so far as his Continental tour was concerned.

* Since this chapter was published, an imitation of this ballad, (by Sir Walter Scott, with music by A. Sullivan,) has been given to the world. But it can also be had with the original words and music ; as quoted here.

And now there was yet something else which his uncle desired to talk over with him, beyond and above the unpalatable fact that he must confine his expenses to his own means, and expect no more of this system of what he carelessly termed 'clearing' him, henceforth and for ever!

Sir Douglas arrived at Kenneth's apartments on the Chiaja, very early, very anxious, rather weary, and thoroughly resolved. He had begun to think there was some truth in the severe opinion expressed by his friend Lorimer Boyd, that the great misfortune of Kenneth's life was his uncle's indulgence.

'Of course,' that friend had said, 'so long as you put a feather-bed for him to fall upon, he will pitch head-foremost like a harlequin, into every scrape and trap on the stage of existence. Leave him to suffer consequences. Either he is capable or incapable of self-conduct. In the one case all your love and pains won't save him, and in the other he will at last find his real level. If I had had an idea you were so in your dotage about this lad, Douglas, I declare I never would have written to you. I expected you to come down upon him in a stern, dignified, offended-guardian sort of way, and here you are for all the world like a nursing mother, whose precious babe has had a tumble! Do, for God's sake, let this be the last time that you actually *help* him to escape from the only lesson his careless mind can profit by—namely, bitter experience.'

There was truth in these words; and they beat hotly in Sir Douglas's ears, as he turned restlessly on his pillow the night they returned from Sorrento. The hours of that night passed on from silvery moonlight to the blue dawn and the crimson glory of sunrise, without bringing him needful rest. There was too much in the day that was coming, and the day that had passed, for night to be anything but a bar or gap, to divide those eventful intervals.

When the morning stir of life began once more—early as such life begins in the streets of Naples—Sir Douglas bathed, dressed, and went out. Even if Kenneth was not yet up, he would wait. His nephew's manner, the previous evening, had rather wounded him. It was saucy, sullen, and dissatisfied. It was easy to see that he thought himself maltreated, and his uncle officious, in the plover of Lady Charlotte. Kenneth knew that Gertrude disliked and resented any overt disrespect to her mother, yet he could not for the life of him abstain. He thought Lady Charlotte ridiculous, and he showed that he thought her so. He thought Gertrude neglectful of him, and almost, in her calm way, repellent to him the evening before. He was accustomed to be flattered and caressed.

He had bid them all good night very curtly, getting out of the carriage in the Chiaja, instead of seeing them to the Villa Mandrillo, and had walked away with a cigar in his mouth,—looking so like his handsome, wilful father, that, instead of feeling angry, foolish Sir Douglas looked after him with aching tenderness and intense good-will !

On arriving at his lodgings on this particular morning, not only Sir Douglas did not find Kenneth up (that, perhaps, with his habits was scarcely to be expected), but it was doubtful, from the hesitating manner of the servant, whether he had been in at all, since the previous day. Sir Douglas said little to the man, and passed into the room which had been the scene of his first interview and useless lecture. Breakfast was laid, as then ; but not yet touched. All was in the same sort of order, or disorder. The very sunshine appeared to be lying in stereotyped lines on the parquet floor. Sir Douglas threw himself into a lounge-chair by the window, and once more thought over all he meant to say to his nephew ; putting it into the most patient loving words he could frame.

Gradually the silence and warmth, after the rapid morning walk and long wakeful night, had their effect in spite of anxiety ; and Kenneth's uncle slept as soundly as Lady Charlotte had done after her adventure with the recalcitrant mule at Sorrento.

It is Lord Brougham's theory (and it is also the theory of other thinkers on the same subject) that dreams occupy only a few moments before our waking, and that during their brief passage through the brain, they blend and connect themselves with outward objects of sense and sound.

In proof of which, he says, you have only to go and run a pin sharply into a slumbering friend ; and he will inform you, as he starts into consciousness, that he had dreamed for a considerable time ; that he has, in fact, had a very long dream, of being attacked by robbers in a wood, or otherwise wounded,—with all graphic and interesting details ; all depending on that cruel little poke with a pin which you privately know you had experimentally inflicted upon him a minute before.

Sir Douglas dreamed a very pleasant dream ; of wandering in Paradise with Gertrude (and without Lady Charlotte) through interminable groves of orange-trees, white with blossom and golden with fruit ; while beyond a sort of rainbow caused by the spray of innumerable fountains, for ever rising and falling and lapping against basins of white marble carved with wreaths of immense lilies,—forms of angelic grace, in shimmering vestments of the faintest and most

delicate colours, sang to their golden harps in a most ravishing manner; ending always with the burthen, 'Here, there is peace!'

Just as he was straining his dreaming ear for words he could not catch—owing apparently to the very indistinct pronunciation of these agreeable angels—something struck him, lightly but sharply, on the temple; and again immediately afterwards on the cheek.

He started and woke; but so strange was the scene acting round him, that for a minute he fancied that also must be a dream.

A woman shabbily dressed, with resplendent black eyes, and a thin black silk shawl carelessly adjusted over shoulders very obviously deformed, was picking out from manuscript notation a melody of Blumenthal's for the guitar. A young girl (scarcely in courtesy to be called a young lady), rather pretty, very pale, and dirty and neglected in her dress, sat at the breakfast-table, picking the bones of a chicken; not ungracefully, though she picked them with her fingers, and seemed exceedingly hungry. Another 'young lady,' still prettier, still paler, and (if possible) in a still more neglected toilette, sat perched on the scrollwork end of the stiff satin sofa opposite Sir Douglas's chair. It is to be presumed that she was less hungry than her companion, since her occupation was biting off with her very even white teeth the budding oranges and orange-flowers from a large branch she held in her hand, and aiming at the sleeper with these fragrant pellets.

When this young nymph beheld his amazed eyes open and fix themselves upon her, she leaped from her perch with a lithe activity which even Zizine could not have surpassed, and shrieking out, 'Si sveglia! si sveglia!'—* with a peal of laughter re-echoed by the other occupants of the apartment, she flitted to the furthest end, where a heavy *portière* of yellow silk divided the outer from the inner chamber; and folding the massive brocade round her, so as only to leave her laughing head visible, seemed to expect that the victim she had so unceremoniously attacked, would start from his trance and follow her. Perceiving after a little breathless pause that this was not to be, she flung the curtains behind her, and returned; making first a few slow steps on the very tips of her toes, then the light and rapid run performed by ballet-dancers, then three or four pirouettes in succession, and a profound curtsy as a finale.

During the bewildered moment that followed, while Sir Douglas, feeling his situation already sufficiently absurd, looked angrily round

* He wakes! He wakes!

for his hat, she skipped, cat-like, into one of the great arm-chairs, and stood up in it as in a rostrum, leaning her arms over the cushioned back, with a roll of music which she had snatched up on the way, and with mock gravity of recitation commenced an oration.

'Stimatissimo Signore,' said she in a most nasal Neapolitan *patois*, 'we rejoice and felicitate you on having slumbered so well, and we hope——'

What further foolery they might have performed cannot be known, since just as Sir Douglas attempted to leave the room,—with the courtesy (even to them) of a bow which should include the trio,—and amid renewed peals of mocking laughter, the door opened and Kenneth came in.

Kenneth!

His aspect on that bright Italian morning could scarcely be surpassed in degradation. Staggering drunk; his eyes bloodshot and stupefied; his hair dishevelled; his dress neglected and disordered; his face almost as pale as those of the wild intruders already present, he stood, swaying to and fro, with the handle of the door in his hand, apparently attempting to comprehend what was going on in his rooms.

The door, like many in the old palaces of Naples, was overlaid with tarnished but richly-patterned gilding; and beyond it was another of the heavy yellow satin brocade *portières*. He stood there like a picture set in a wondrous frame. His youth, his exceeding beauty, the grace and strength of his form, only made his present state of untidy helplessness the more saddening. It was a horrible vision!

There was a moment of suspense during which all stood still. Then his countenance, which had worn a sort of puzzled, embarrassed, idiotic smile of greeting, suddenly assumed an expression of savage anger as he turned slowly from looking at Sir Douglas, and fixed his dull red eyes on the group of women, now huddled together, the elder adjusting her shawl and rolling up her manuscript music, as if in the act of departure.

'How dare you come here? how many hundred times have I forbid your coming here in the morning?' muttered the half-conscious drunkard, in broken Italian.

'You told me on the contrary last night to come to breakfast, and that you would give me a good breakfast,'—whimpered the girl, who had been seated at the table picking chicken-bones.

'You told me you would like to practise that barcarole; and besides, Signore, to-night is my benefit!'—rapidly protested

the elder of the three; 'and I wanted, therefore, to see your Excellency.'

Then they both spoke together; with loud, shrill, vehement chattering; till the nimble dancer who had awakened Sir Douglas by flinging orange-blossoms, and who had hitherto sat dangling her feet from the arm of the great chair as a mere looker-on, interfered, and struck up the hand Kenneth had extended towards them in angry gesticulation, with the words, 'Va! tu sei ubriaco come un porco'—'You're as drunk as a hog.' Kenneth seized her by the arm.

'Who says I am drunk? Who dares to say I'm drunk?' shouted he; 'you shall be punished—you shall be imprisoned.'

'Lascia!' exclaimed the girl, releasing her arm from his grasp, and looking him contemptuously in the face—'e dormi!'

'Bestia!' added she in a tone of disgust, as she shook her arm free, and attempted to pass him.

There was a moment when Sir Douglas actually expected Kenneth would return her insult with a blow. He made a step forwards, and Kenneth's arm dropped heavily by his side; but he continued to look at the girl with a dull glare of anger.

'Go!' said he. 'Get out, all of you!'

'What a polite Signore!' said the dancer, with a forced laugh; 'ah! there is no one like an Englishman for fine manners.'

'Go!' shouted the drunkard, with an infuriated stamp of his foot; still leaning on the lock of the door with his left hand.

'At your pleasure!' bowed the girl, mockingly; and she followed her frightened companions out on the staircase. As she passed she turned her pale pretty head, as the head of the Cenci is turned in the famous picture, and snapped her fingers at him with a gesture of derision and defiance common among the lower orders of the Neapolitana, and which those who study books of chiromancy can find and practise if they please.

There are occasions in life in which beauty seems to wear the devil's stamp on it, and becomes repulsive instead of attractive.

Such an occasion was the present!

Impossible to be more regularly and perfectly beautiful than Kenneth Ross: he might have been painted as an ideal Apollo. Impossible to have thrown more intense grace of attitude into any action than was shown in that pallid girl's vulgar and unseemly farewell. But the effect of all this grace and beauty,—under the circumstances,—on the sole spectator, was as if he had been struck down by some demoniac spell.

As the door closed on the departing group Sir Douglas sank back in his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Kenneth also seated himself with a staggering gait, and, leaning both arms across the breakfast-table, addressed Sir Douglas; clipping his husky words, and alternately attempting to stand, and dropping back into his seat.

'You think, I suppose, that these people ain't—ain't r'spectable? They *are* r'spectable! Wife of leader of orchestra,—great friend of mine, and leader of orchestra. *You* couldn't lead orchestra, for all you give yourself such connoisseur airs about music. Quite r'spectable. *Could* you lead orchestra, now? Come, I say, could you, uncle?' and he laughed an idiotic laugh.

'O Kenneth, go to bed, and end this scene.'

'No, I won't go to bed. You think I'm drunk. I'm not drunk. D—— it, do you think you're to come the schoolmaster for ever over me, as if I were ten years old? I ain't drunk. I know all about it. I know that—that to-day's Tuesday; and we're—we're going to settle accounts. There! is *that* drunk? And we're going—going to Amalfi—going to pick up old ladies who can't—can't ride, eh? Going to—Amalfi. All right; let's go to—to Amalfi; only don't say I'm drunk; and don't set old mother Skifton saying I'm drunk; nor Ger—Ger—'

Sir Douglas sprang to his feet. 'Wretched boy!' exclaimed he, 'don't dare to utter her name.'

Then recovering himself, he repeated sadly, 'O Kenneth, go to your room; go to bed; I'll not irritate you by any observations; if you're not drunk, at least you're not well. We can't talk business while you are in this state. We will put off business till to-morrow. I will return for you later. It is very early still; you will get some hours of sleep. Give me your hand. There, go to your room. Good-bye for the present. Go and rest.'

The cigar-smoking valet bowed Sir Douglas out, muttering, with obsequious smiles, that he would give 'remedies;' that his young Excellency had unfortunately 'met some friends' late last night, and that the 'friends' often persuaded his young Excellency to excesses he would not otherwise think of. Winding up (in the inevitable style of Italian flattery) that he was sure the young Excellency, *in reality*, would have greatly preferred being with his beloved and illustrious uncle to all other society, in Naples, or elsewhere.

The story of Kenneth's evening would indeed have amazed that sober uncle! Going towards his lodgings in a very discontented

frame of mind, he had met with and joined a group of those so-called 'friends,' returning from the theatre of San Carlo. The rest of the night was spent by all in gambling, drinking, and dissipation. When day-dawn was near, he had again lost sums that for him were enormous. The two men who were the largest winners were all for departing with their gains. Kenneth objected: he claimed his *revanche* and appealed to the others. A hot dispute ensued, some of those present being for dispersing, and some thinking Kenneth's proposal no more than reasonable. A young Portuguese nobleman, whose reputation for riches had made him the centre of a certain circle of wild young men, then took the side of the loser. He insisted on remaining and sharing the fate of the *revanche* with Kenneth. They staked and lost, staked and won, staked and lost again. At length one of their boon companions addressed the Portuguese in a bantering tone, 'Come, Marquis, you are out of luck; try once more,—any stake you please,—and that shall end it.' The young man looked round, set his teeth with a strange smile, and said, 'Well! I'll win it all back with a yard or two of cambic. Mr. Ross, will you go halves in my luck? Two throws of the dice; that won't greatly delay us.'

Yes; Kenneth would go halves in any stake. What was it to be?

The young Marquis rapidly divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, drew over his head one of those wonderfully embroidered Parisian shirts, which he coolly informed the company had cost him seven hundred francs;* observed with a scoffing laugh, as he took his stand by the gaming-table, that his present costume closely resembled that of an English gentleman about to engage in a boxing-match (a sport in which, foreigners believe we continually indulge), and then threw the dice. In a few minutes his adversaries, who had thought the scene infinitely diverting, looked rather grave: they had had their throws, and lost.

He had won back the greater portion of the sums they hoped to divide amongst themselves.

He lifted the embroidered dandy garment from the table, tossed it over his arm, made a salute full of gay irony to the company, retired to re-invest himself with the usual amount of clothing, and was heard, a few minutes later, humming an air from the opera of the evening, as he passed down the Toledo on his way to the hotel.

Kenneth had departed with him; having drunk almost too

* This anecdote is a fact, though it did not take place in Naples.

deeply to stand or walk, and with a dim sense, even then, of shame and annoyance, increased, as we have seen, to more intense irritation, by the scene which awaited him in his apartments.

Shrouded now in luxurious curtains, his head feeling as though blistered with fire, and with just enough sense remaining for sullen consciousness of pain,—cursing his folly, his valet, and the remedies by which the latter proposed to put him in a condition to re-appear creditably in the course of the afternoon,—Kenneth remained for blank hours ‘resting’ in his disordered apartment; while Sir Douglas, once more stepping out into the morning light, directed his steps past the quarter of Sta. Lucia, to the distant verandas of the Villa Mandórlo.

‘There,’ thought he, as he looked at the pleasant sunshine falling on the white walls, ‘there at least, dwells such an image of peace, purity and quiet affection, as might mend any man’s broken trust in the goodness of human nature!’

CHAPTER X.

NOMINAL LOVE.

KENNETH ROSS also betook himself to the Villa Mandórlo.

Tolerably early in the afternoon (considering all that had occurred), he got languidly into an open carriage, and directed the coachman to drive there; leaving a message for Sir Douglas that he would join him with the rest of the party instead of waiting his return at the palazzo.

Truth to say, Kenneth had no great wish to meet Sir Douglas again so soon. Perhaps to listen to comments extremely unpalatable on his recent conduct; certainly to feel embarrassed and annoyed by the recollection of what had passed. He had other reasons for desiring to pay this visit as speedily as possible, and he dressed with more haste than was usual with him, or consistent with his many little luxurious fancies; making one long pause before a full-length mirror ere he turned to leave the apartment, he and his valet both fixedly contemplating the image reflected there.

The valet smiled: he thought the young Excellency must be quite satisfied: no one could see more than that his Excellency was ‘*un poco pallido*,’ which was rather interesting than otherwise.

But for once Kenneth was too absorbed to care for compliment. For once he was thinking seriously; though it must be admitted those profound reflections entirely centred in Self.

He was thinking—with that irritated discontent which, in ill-regulated minds, takes the place of penitence—of all the scrapes, follies, and entangled snares of his past life. He was thinking, not without a certain degree of kindliness, of Sir Douglas. Not with much gratitude: for it is a very curious fact that gratitude seldom follows over-indulgence; there is no gratitude where there is not respect, and a consciousness that the benefits conferred have not only gone beyond our deserts, but beyond our deserts even in the opinion of those who have conferred them.

That fond yielding, that love without a conscience, which can 'refuse nothing' to the object beloved,—is trespassed upon again and again, without creating any corresponding sense of favour shown or sacrifices made. It grows to be depended on with blind confidence, but it is received with so little thankfulness, that if at any time a hint seems to be reached, and a halt made in the system of benefactions, the recipient forthwith looks upon his position as that of an ill-used martyr.

'The idea of Old Sir Douglas stickling at helping me now, when he has come forward a dozen times in much worse scrapes without saying a word!' was a speech of Kenneth's over which Lorimer Boyd had frequently growled, but the sentiment of which, to the speaker, seemed perfectly just and natural.

There is a training which helps a man to see life in its true aspect, and there is a training which leads him to see all things reversed and upside down. There are also, it must be confessed, men on whom, as on certain animals, no amount of training seems to tell: minds which no warning will impress: souls to which that text has no mystery and no meaning which bids us 'stand in the way and consider which were the old paths, and walk in them: ' hearts which are brayed in the mortar of suffering, and yet remain hard.

And this because the inner human nature is subject to as much variety as the outward human form. You may take half-a-dozen children of the same parents, and put them under the same tutor and governess, the same spiritual pastor, the same conditions and opportunities of life; and out of all that sameness you shall have a diversity of character so startling that the utmost stretch of our intelligence can scarcely comprehend it.

Yet we shut our eyes to the fact.

Some rosy fearless prattler lifts its brilliant gaze, and tells us, of another little one who stands aside and pouts, that her brother was 'always shy from a baby.' Some old nurse echoes the opinion that 'Master Jackey was the troublesome one in *our* nursery; Master Willie was always easy to manage.' But not the less does 'his honour the Magistrate' continue to rate the mechanic for having neglected to 'look better after' the precocious little thief for whom the perplexed father says he 'allays did his best;' and not the less do parents of honest well-conducted children, complacently attribute to their own 'bringing up,' this satisfactory state of matters,—never heeding the patent fact that their dissolute neighbour, who has brought up *his* children on oaths and 'skilly,' is also the father of pious innocent daughters, and of laborious decent sons.

Nor can you shut your child in a crystal case, to save him from harm and pollution. You can but set good and evil before him for choice (as much good and as little evil as may be), and the balance of his nature does the rest: just as you can but give him the best mental teaching your means will supply, and the balance of his intelligence does the rest. It was Solomon, not Jesus, who pronounced, in the self-confidence of human wisdom, that if you brought up a child in the way he should go, when he was old he would not depart from it. There are those who remain sons of perdition; those who sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. It may be true that human hearts are as a general rule 'deceitful and desperately wicked,' but some hearts are *more* deceitful and *more* desperately wicked than others. The heaven of sin may exist in all, but most assuredly it never was so perfectly mixed as to secure to each an equal distribution. The 'weak brother,' and the man who 'hath said in his heart, There is no God,' will display their varieties in the thorny open ground which has superseded the Garden of Eden. Even as it came to pass, in the earliest motherhood on earth, that ABEL reverently knelt to the All-seeing and All-punishing Creator,—and Eve's other son, CAIN, slew him!

Kenneth had had his fair average chances. The good and the evil had both been before him. If his untaught and ungovernable mother had made his holidays, both in boyhood and youth, times to try the relative proportions in his nature of better and worse; in those far longer periods which were *not* spent with her—the periods of school and college—he had the advantage of wise and excellent masters, and companions not likely to corrupt him.

And even in his earlier home his tutor stepfather had done his duty honestly and carefully by the boy ; both before and since the mis-matched marriage which Maggie's great beauty at that time bewildered him into making, even without reckoning the possession of a settled home, where he expected to be, but never was, master.

As to over-indulgent Sir Douglas, he had not been there to spoil his little nephew ; and his letters and theories were models of good counsel and grave affection.

Such as Kenneth was, then, he was of his own created nature ; having resisted (what alone can be bestowed by the fondest guidance, on the best or the worst of us) all attempts made to show him what was amiss in his inherent disposition—all persuasion, however eloquent the persuader, to 'stand in the way and consider,'—all efforts to bring him not so much under the government of others, as under *self-government*. The only rule which is safe from rebellion !

On this especial morning he had, as has been stated, that dim discontented consciousness of the result of his errors which is quite distinct from, and independent of, any feeling of repentance. He felt that, somehow or other, things had gone wrong, and that they required setting to rights ; and the mode in which he resolved to set things to rights was by marrying Gertrude Skifton, and giving up, after that, at all events in a great measure, many of the habits which led to so much disaster and inconvenience.

He had always intended this, ever since he had first made her acquaintance. He was what is called 'smitten' immediately with her grace of manner, with her singing, and even with her looks, though Gertrude was not a showy beauty. He heard she had money, and altogether he settled in his own mind that she should be his wife.

He made no more doubt of her acceptance of him, whenever he should ask her, than he did that the sun would rise next day. He had received what he not unfairly considered encouragement from her mother ; he was constantly, incessantly, asked to the house ; and though Gertrude herself did not do or say much in the way of encouragement, she was evidently more pleased to see him than other friends, and she was, he considered, 'one of your quiet girls,' who could not under the circumstances be expected to say more.

He had intended to wait to make his uncle aware of his choice, until the scrapes and embarrassments of his position were cleared away. He could hardly go to Lady Charlotte Skifton and propose for Gertrude till his affairs were in a little better order. But this morning he had changed his mind. He was afraid, after the scene

he had witnessed, that Sir Douglas might consider some probation or purgation necessary; which would not at all suit him. He resolved, therefore, to cast the die; to make the step he contemplated, irrevocable; and *then* to go to his uncle and say, 'You see I am engaged to marry this girl—a marriage that cannot but please you, who have been preaching something of the sort a long time. Now settle up the difficulties which press upon me, and let me have a proper start, and I'll turn over a new leaf: for, in fact, I'm sick of the life I'm leading.'

When he entered the marble-paved sitting-room, with bright carpets scattered over it, which opened into the decorated gardens of the Villa Mandórlo; he thought, as Gertrude rose to greet him, he had never before seen her look so beautiful. Her complexion was ordinarily rather dull and colourless, but to-day a pink flush had settled in either cheek, and her manner had something in it tremulous and excited, very different from usual. So different, indeed, that Kenneth began by hoping Lady Charlotte was 'none the worse for yesterday,' conceiving that Gertrude might be nervous on that account.

'No; not at all, thank you. Mamma is quite well; quite; and glad to go on our expedition. We are to sail—Sir Douglas says—to Amalfi. He said he thought it would be less fatiguing, and that you were not very well. Indeed you do not look well,' added she compassionately.

Kenneth was not sorry that he looked interesting and pale; and plunged very immediately into the story of his love and his hopes; having indeed arranged the thread of his discourse as he sat with folded arms in the carriage that had brought him to that familiar portico. A little, very little of the perfect security of acceptance which he felt, pierced through his love declaration. He tried to keep it under, but it was too strong for complete repression.

As Gertrude listened—instead of becoming more nervous and abashed, she turned extremely pale; and fixed her eyes at last on Kenneth's face with an expression of amazement not altogether untinged with pain and displeasure.

There was a moment's pause when he had ended his rapid and declamatory pleading; then she spoke, in a low, clear voice,—

'Mr. Ross, if I had ever given you encouragement—if I had ever even perceived the attachment you say you feel for me, so as to be able to give *dis*couragement to such a suit—I hope you believe that I would not have left you in doubt on the subject. I never expected

this ; I never dreamed of it. I will end a position so painful to both of us at once ; and tell you that Sir Douglas——’

‘ If my uncle has had the cruelty to come here this morning to poison your mind against me, only because of an unlucky scene at the Palazzo——’ burst in Kenneth, with excessive anger, without waiting the conclusion of the sentence.

‘ You are mistaken, utterly mistaken ; he never mentioned you except to say that you were unwell—that we had better sail instead of drive, for that reason.’

‘ What then ? ’

‘ How shall I tell you ? I had intended you should hear it from himself. He is gone to your home. He went half-an-hour ago ; he said he had appointed with you to return——’

She stopped, apparently in painful embarrassment.

‘ What had he to tell me ? ’ said Kenneth, fiercely, his mind still full of the idea that his affairs had somehow been the subject of discussion.

‘ What I must tell you,—now,—at once—and I hope then we may both forget what has just passed between us. Sir Douglas has asked me to become his wife, and I have accepted him.’

Kenneth stared at her doubtfully, angrily, incredulously.

‘ You are to be married to Old Sir Douglas ? ’

‘ I am to be married, I hope, to Sir Douglas.’

With a loud, hoarse, scornful laugh, Kenneth rose.

‘ Come, you will not cure me by ridicule, of my attachment to you,’ he said. ‘ My uncle is fond of treating me as a child ; and if you and he have agreed on some way of reforming me, it is much better you should both be serious, and let me have the benefit of it.’

The offended girl rose also, and with a degree of dignity and sternness of manner of which Kenneth had not thought that soft nature capable, she replied,—

‘ It would, in my opinion, be extremely indecent to jest on such a matter. Nor is Sir Douglas likely to turn his anxieties for you into an acted comedy. I have engaged myself to be his wife. I loved him, I may say, before I even saw him. All I heard of him, all I read of his writing to Mr. Boyd, gave me the impression of his being one of the most loveable of men. I did not know in those days that this great happiness was reserved for me—that he should choose me for his wife ; but what welcome you have had here (a welcome with which you now reproach me) was, I assure you, on account of your relationship to *him*. I saw you with interest—with curiosity—as the nephew of the friend whose letters Lorimer Boyd had so often

read to us, and the bravery of whose gallant exploits he was never weary of recounting.'

Kenneth did not speak. He stood, still staring angrily in her face. His head ached and swam. His hand trembled as he leaned it on the table between them.

'Mr. Ross,' resumed his companion, in a softer tone, 'you are very young; I think you are very little, if at all, older than myself. You will forget the pain of this day, and you will believe—for indeed you may—that I shall always feel as Sir Douglas does towards you,—and I religiously believe that you have hitherto been the main object of interest in his life.'

She held out her hand as she spoke; but Kenneth did not take it. There are men who, when they are rejected by one they thought to win, enter into the despair of sorrow; and there are others who, under like circumstances, enter into the despair of *fury*; and who say things at such times to the object of their so-called 'love,' which, through all their burst of selfish, frantic rage, they themselves know to be cruel atrocious miserable and cowardly falsehoods.

Kenneth passed from the declaration of his so-called love into this despair of fury.

He accused Sir Douglas of the basest treachery; of having supplanted him by a thousand manoeuvres; of having been aided by Lorimer Boyd to 'cut the grass under his feet' from motives of vengeance; Lorimer having himself desired to attain the destiny which he, Kenneth, had made his one great hope in existence. He accused Gertrude of 'throwing him over,' because his uncle and Boyd had conspired to betray to her his embarrassed circumstances; of preferring Sir Douglas only after she had made the discovery that Kenneth was not to be his uncle's heir; of coquetting, and flattering the former into a passion for her, because she thought it a finer thing to be Lady Ross of Glenrossie, than to share his own less magnificent home. He told her he did not believe that she had been indifferent to him, or blind to his obvious attachment; that it was all humbug about his welcome having been given for his unknown uncle's sake. As to that false-hearted uncle, he bitterly affirmed that if Sir Douglas married her, he was marrying from anger, not from love; marrying because he was disappointed in his idea of governing and bullying as if Kenneth were still at school. That no one had a worse opinion of women generally. A thousand times Kenneth had heard him speak of the sex with contemptuous pity and mistrust; and a thousand times declare that he himself never intended to marry, even when urging his nephew to do so.

Finally, he alluded to Gertrude's 'jilting, or having been jilted by,' the foreign prince to whom her mother had endeavoured to marry her. He made the open taunt that 'even now, perhaps, she did not know her own mind;' and he stopped raving only because his heart beat so violently that he feared another moment would bring death to end its tumult. Panting, wild, staggering backwards, he dropped into his chair.

'O Mr. Ross, *will* you hear me?' murmured the girl he had so insulted, approaching him with that mixture of pity and dread which may be seen in the countenances of those who are nursing a delirious patient.

'Do let me speak to you!' and she glided yet nearer, and rested her trembling fingers lightly on his sleeve, as his clenched hand stretched across the table.

In an instant he started to his feet again.

'Don't touch me, girl!' gasped he in a thick, suffocated whisper; 'don't *dare* to touch me! Your touch makes me comprehend how men are brought to commit great crimes! I tell you,' and his voice rose again, 'that I do not believe you! And if I find it true, and that I have been made a dupe and a sport of, between you and my uncle and Boyd, I will stab Sir Douglas in the open street,—so help me Heaven!'

With this blasphemous adjuration he reeled towards the door. It opened as he reached it; and Lady Charlotte, with a puzzled expression of fear on her face, confronted him.

'What are you both talking of, so loud and dreadfully?' she said.

'O mamma! beg Mr. Ross not to go just yet! beg him to wait till—till—'

Gertrude looked in her mother's gentle, foolish, bewildered face,—made an attempt to meet her, and fainted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WAYWARD HEART.

THEN Kenneth had an opportunity of verifying the truth of a beautiful saying of one now lost and gone, namely, that 'God, who makes such various degrees of weakness and strength in this world of ours, never yet made anything so weak that it will not seek to defend what it loves.'

The feeble silly woman who was Gertrude's mother, said her few words of protection and defence as sensibly as if she had been the most strong-minded of females; reproaching Kenneth for his want of chivalrous feeling and gentlemanlike patience, under disappointment. She relapsed, indeed, into querulous foolishness at one moment, when she told the exasperated young man, that if he really loved her daughter, he ought to be glad to see her better married than to himself; and that 'of course,' for her own part, she liked better to have Sir Douglas with her, who amused her and treated her with consideration, than Kenneth, who only laughed at her. Neither could she forbear adding, with reference to the new suitor for her daughter's hand, that she felt more as if he was a papa-in-law than a son-in-law, as she herself was not very old, and Gertrude was so much younger, and there was 'so much unexpectedness about the matter.' But she was sure it would make everybody very happy (Kenneth included) 'by-and-bye, when they all got used to it.'

Gertrude, in a few trembling sentences, better adapted to soften the wrathful and selfish mood of her disappointed lover, obtained at last of him that he would behave outwardly as if nothing had occurred; await with what patience he could, Sir Douglas's explanation; and allow all arrangements to proceed for their day together, without blighting it by a vain storm of unavailing complaint.

'It is partly for your own sake, Mr. Ross,' she added, in a voice as sweet as her singing, and with a sorrowful smile; 'chiefly, indeed, for your own sake; though it would be a miserable beginning to my different future, if I thought I were to be in any way the cause of alienation between you and your uncle. I could wish him never to know that you had an ungente thought towards him—never to know——'

'Of course, I don't want him to know that I have been here on a fool's errand this morning,' said Kenneth, bitterly, 'at all events, till I choose to tell him myself.'

'There is no necessity to tell him. I wish you could look upon it all as a dream. You cannot think how unreal it all seems to me, that—that you should think you loved me!'

'It is a dream that will haunt me through life, whatever you may think of it,' replied he, quickly and passionately; 'but God knows what may happen. You are not his wife yet, and perhaps you never may be. Don't you think I had better begin "behaving as usual," by going down to see if the boat is ready? I will wait for you there.'

He spoke the last sentence with a wild sort of joyless laugh. In truth, Kenneth was not even now perfectly recovered from the previous night's drunkenness; and the very first thing he did, when the carriage had whirled him back to the Chiaja, was to increase still further the state of mingled depression and excitement in which he found himself, by pouring out and tossing off a full glass of Florentine 'Chartreuse.'

His thoughts then wandered from Gertrude; wandered to Lorimer Boyd; to an observation of his as to the ludicrous contrast between the supposed retirement for the service of God, and devotion to thoughts of Heaven, involved in the profession of monachism; and the establishment of a manufactory for the sale of spirituous liquors, perfumes, rouge, soaps, and delicate unguents, for the support of the monastery and its inmates: 'selling the devil's wares to build churches with!'

Then, with a rush, came back all the pain and mortification of the last hours. Very reckless, very comfortless, Kenneth felt; and very lonely, alone with the monk's green bottle. Some young Italian friends came in, and rallied him on his dejected looks; told him he was no Englishman if he could not stand a merry night without being ill the next morning.

Kenneth did not stand rallying well, though he was fond of practising it towards others. His friends thought him ill-tempered, and left him; to lounge away an hour somewhere else. Kenneth took a cigar; smoked, considered, and drank again. Then, with an impatient sigh, he once more took his hat, and with a sort of dreamy plan yet to supplant his uncle Douglas, and overcome the difficulties in his way, and with an increasing conviction that Gertrude, 'in reality,' had cared, and did care for him, and that somehow he was being made the victim of a plot for his reformation, he sauntered to the shore: hailing the lazy boat, with its lazy occupants, on a lazy sea whose wavelets beat like a slackened pulse to and fro in the sunshine on the smooth sands,—and feeling all the while as if he were walking in a dream. The scent of mignonette and violets was in the air, and more than once a flower-girl crossed his path, and smilingly tossed him a bunch of Neapolitan violets,—sure to be paid on some careless morrow, with ten times the value of her flowers,—and looking after the handsome young Englishman with something like a puzzled anxiety, on account of the unusual look of abstraction and anxiety visible in his countenance.

The tranquil do-nothing-ness of the people smote him as he

passed. Life, and life's cares, what were they in Naples? Why should any one sigh, or dream, or be anxious, in such a climate and among such a population? Why should he be less careless than the dark-bearded, dark-browed, sallow men lounging outside the cafés? Why not enjoy life as the laughing, loud-talking, crowded groups in the overloaded *calessos* did, as they rattled along? What folly to pin a man's hopes on *one* hope, and deem all life to come darkened, because one capricious girl repulsed his love, for the singular, ludicrous caprice of preferring his elderly uncle!

A little whimsical twinge of vanity wound up all; such as rounds those quaint old-fashioned verses on baffled love:—

‘Will, when looking well can’t win her,
Looking ill, prevail?
Prythee, why so pale?’

He looked across the blue sea streaked with rippling gold, and at the sails that here and there flitted over its surface like white butterflies, and felt his great irritation die away for the hour, in a mixture of stupefaction and languor. His uncle stood by his side, and had placed one hand on his shoulder with careless cordiality, before he was even aware of his presence. He started, and looked up into the frank soldier-like countenance with some attempt at an answering smile.

‘I have been to the Palazzo,’ said Sir Douglas, cheerily, ‘but, like the old woman in the nursery ballad, when I looked after my sick puppy, he was out, and quite recovered. No, not quite recovered;’ added he, with sudden gravity—‘how ill you look! Oh, Kenneth, my dear boy, if you could but mend your ways! if I could but see you what I dreamed you would be!’

‘For God’s sake let us have none of that now,’ muttered the young man as he turned away towards the boat.

‘No, no, you are right: not now—not now: I had something, however,—something quite different,—to say to you, Kenneth; but it will keep till to-morrow: there is no time for anything; here come our ladies, and Lorimer.’

Our ladies! yes; for that day of careless companionship; and then—what then? Was Kenneth indeed to be distanced and put aside in his wooing by the man whom, if he had guessed the world through, he never would have hit upon, as his rival? It seemed scarcely credible. He would try yet. He would throw for that stake again. He could not get rid of the notion, based on his

excessive vanity, that there was some agreement to test and try him ; to pass him through a sort of ordeal of hot ploughshares, and then all was to end in an agreeable little comedy ; his uncle smilingly joining the hands of the young couple, and giving them his paternal blessing.

The idea strengthened as Gertrude and her mother advanced : the latter giving a little glad wave of her fringed parasol at Sir Douglas and calling out something about 'military punctuality on the field of battle ;' the former, with all the serenity of her soft eyes gone, anxiously looking, not at Sir Douglas, but to Kenneth ; and taking his hand with a sigh of relief, while the flush deepened on her cheek as he had seen it deepen in the morning, when he first entered the Villa Mandórlo to declare his love.

It was Kenneth, too, who handed her into the boat, and seated himself by her side ; his uncle and Lady Charlotte being opposite, and Lorimer Boyd unslinging his sketching portfolio and putting it down with Gertrude's guitar-case at their feet. For the moment, Kenneth's spirits rose.

No one could tell, not even Kenneth himself—for these things depend as entirely as the warning sense of danger in animals, on quick instinct rather than reason or calculation—why the conviction of his hope being founded on folly, and on expectations that never would be realised, fell suddenly with a cold chill on his heart.

Something in Gertrude's manner to Sir Douglas, something in Sir Douglas's manner to her, in the intense quiet gloom of Lorimer Boyd ; in the fidgety and increased attention of Lady Charlotte to his uncle ;—struck his excited mind as proof positive that the little comedy he had conceived might be enacted for his benefit, was *not* being played : that all was real bitter earnest : that he had vowed in vain to quit his foolish course of life and 'better his condition' in more ways than one, by uniting his destiny with Gertrude Skifton's ; that he had planned in vain scenes of lover-like anger and lover-like forgiveness, when she should at length admit that she had merely joined his guardian friend in schemes of reformation ; that she had no such scheme, and no *arrière pensée*, but in all singleness and truth of heart, loved Sir Douglas, and was beloved by him !

Those who have been jealous,—who have known what it is to receive that

' Confirmation strong
As proofs of holy writ '—

which is brought to the inner soul by looks, words, or circumstances, which to uninterested spectators seem trivial, or utterly indifferent, —may comprehend the revelation. It was not brought by any increased *empressment* or happy security in Sir Douglas's manner : he had always been dignified ; even from boyhood, when his inimical step-mother had sneered at him as ' that very gentlemanlike young gentleman, Mr. Douglas Ross ; ' he was the last man in the world to make a public wooing of the object of his choice. Nor was Gertrude likely to indulge in that peculiar manner sometimes not very gracefully adopted by ' engaged ' young ladies. To a stranger and ordinary acquaintance, the very curves and indentations of the Bay of Naples could not seem more unchanged since the previous day, than the conduct of all parties concerned. But to Kenneth, enamoured as far as his nature was capable of diverging from self, stung and shaken in the very midst of his utter security of success—and involuntarily watchful of the least sign that should confirm or alter his wavering conjectures, the meaning of all he saw was written in fire on his brain. The ' Mene, mene, tekél, upharsin,' that prophesied the loss of his heart's kingdom, came between him and the shining white sail of the lightly wafted boat,—even as it stole over the marble walls of the feasting monarch in Scripture. His head, aching and dizzy from the renewed excess of stimulant taken on his return from the Villa Mandóro, became confused alike from the crowding of comfortless thoughts and the movement of the bark over the waters. He passed his hand across his brow several times as if in pain ; and began talking wildly, cynically, and in a strain anything but moral, of love and lovers. The attempt to answer, or to repress his talk, only excited him the more. He was conscious, but rather as if dreaming than waking, of the expression of shame, sorrow, and anxiety, which clouded his uncle's face ; of intense and deadly fear in that of Gertrude ; of utter scorn in Lorimer Boyd's. While Lady Charlotte, really angry at the things said before her daughter, but not exactly knowing how to notice them, kept biting the end of her parasol and repeating with a foolish smile, ' You naughty boy, arn't you ashamed to say such wickedness before your uncle ? '

Kenneth noticed her addressing him, with a hoarse laugh. ' Oh, my uncle is younger than I am,' he said ; ' we are to be boon companions soon. I believe he is in love. Mr. Lorimer Boyd, grave Mr. Lorimer Boyd, were *you* ever in love ? Were you a faithful shepherd, or do you hold, as I do, with Alfred de Musset—

"Aimer est le grand point,—qu'importe la maîtresse ?
Qu'importe le flacon pourvu qu'on ait l'ivresse ?
S'il est vrai que Schiller n'ait aimé qu'Amélie,
Goethe que Marguerite, et Rousseau que Julie,
Que la terre"

What comes next ? by Jove, I can't recollect in the least, what comes next. Do you recollect, uncle ? you're a French scholar.*

Sir Douglas was looking back towards Naples. 'I think we will return,' said he sadly and sternly. 'Kenneth, you are quite well enough to understand me when I say that your conduct here, where those present have no option but to listen to you, is an outrage on all good taste and good feeling.'

Kenneth looked towards him with fierce moodiness, apparently irresolute what reply to make. Then, his eye falling on the guitar-case, he sullenly touched it with his foot. 'Perhaps you think there should be no conversation at all. Singing would be better : chansons d'adieu : "Partant pour la Syrie,"—which, being a soldier's love-song, the French take, very properly, for their notion of a national hymn. Shall you sing again this evening, Miss Gertrude Skifton ? Shall you sing us a chanson d'adieu ?'

The lovely eyes were lifted to his in mute deprecation and appeal, but in vain.

'Do sing ! sing us the song of last night : "Adieu for evermore !"'

'Kenneth, I implore—I *command* you—to be silent !' said Sir Douglas, in a voice trembling with suppressed passion.

'Silent ? quite silent ? very well—yes. I am *de trop* here. I'll sing an adieu myself. I'll give you an adieu in plain prose. Don't trouble yourselves to put back to Naples by way of getting rid of me ; I'll give you "adieu for evermore" without that ; for I'll bear this d—d life no longer !'

With the last sentence Kenneth stood up ; rocking the boat, and causing Lady Charlotte to utter a series of little sharp short shrieks of terror. As he spoke the concluding words, he touched the mast lightly with his hand to steady his leap, sprang head-foremost into the waves, and sank before their eyes !

* 'The main point is to love. No matter whom !
Delicious drunkenness !—be thou our doom
From any glass !

What if great Schiller loved
Amelia only ? Goethe's heart were moved
By none save Margaret ? And that Rousseau sighed
But for Julie ? The earth'

Gertrude's shriek echoed her mother's. 'This is my fault,' she said wildly. 'Save him! save him!'

Lorimer Boyd watched the water with a keen glance. 'Can any of you swim?' he said to the boatmen, laying his hand heavily on Sir Douglas's arm, who had already thrown off his coat in preparation for rescue.

'Io, Signor!' answered one of the men.

It is a strange fact that in a seafaring population like that of Naples, very few of the men are able to swim; and still fewer have either courage or presence of mind in emergencies like the one which had just occurred. Many of our English sailors cannot swim. Many gentlemen in various professions, to whom that accomplishment would be not only useful but perhaps absolutely necessary, are equally ignorant of it. When the St. Augustine College at Canterbury was established, it was resolved that even those who were preparing for holy orders should learn to swim; more than one of the pious and energetic followers of George Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, having lost their lives from incapacity in this respect.

One man, and one only, on board the Neapolitan bark of pleasure which bore Kenneth and his companions, could swim. That one had been a coral-diver, and, in the exercise of his dangerous profession, many a bold and daring feat, many a narrow and hair-breadth escape, had been his.

'Io, Signor!'

And, while he spoke, he stood half-naked, watching, as Lorimer Boyd watched, across the waters near at hand,—for the wretched, beautiful, drunken youth who ought to rise there, or somewhere thereabouts. A dreadful watch.

But Kenneth was cumbered, not only with the will to perish,—the will of a drunken, languid man—but with the clothing he had almost mechanically adopted in preparation for a moon-light return to Naples, over the chilly waters of the sun-forsaken sea.

A heavy fur pelisse, strapped and fastened at the throat, in addition to his usual over-coat, made Kenneth's habiliments a dreadful obstacle to his safety from that self-sought grave. But the merciful chance was yet in his favour, that the coral-diver, Giuseppe, happened to be one of the crew that day!

While others of the crew were exclaiming, and praying to saints and madonnas, this man,—stripped to the last and lightest of garments,—watched and waited; and, when the involun-

tary rising of the drunken suicide took place, he was there to rescue him.

There was no struggle. Kenneth was utterly insensible when Giuseppe swam towards the bark, which neared him as far as was practicable. The difficulty was to get both on board. That also was accomplished at last, and the bark was steered towards the haven it had so lately left.

CHAPTER XII.

BITTER PANGS.

SNATCHED from death,—but pale, insensible, and apparently dying in spite of rescue, Kenneth Ross was borne on shore, and taken to the luxurious lodging in the Palazzo on the Chiaja, which he had so lately left in the pride and strength of youthful manhood. Sir Douglas accompanied him; loth to lose sight of him even for the purpose of escorting Gertrude to the Villa Mandorlo. Lorimer Boyd would see her and her mother home.

To Lorimer Boyd, her father's friend and her own, Gertrude Skifton resolved to confide the agitating events of the morning; to beseech his intervention with this hot-headed and reckless young man, and to endeavour in some way to arrange so as to spare Sir Douglas the pain of knowing what had occurred between him and Gertrude.

'I am sure,' she said, 'you will forgive me for appealing to you, Mr. Boyd. Your constant kindness to my father,—for many a weary day of suffering and illness,—and your tender compassion to myself and my poor mother, make me look to you almost as a second father; as a friend who will not forsake, or think anything a trouble. Do not let Sir Douglas know what has passed. I owe to *you* all my first knowledge of him: of his goodness, his unselfishness, his courage, his loveable qualities. Of course, when I saw him'—(and here poor Gertrude both smiled and blushed)—'seeing him rather surprised me. I had imagined a much older and sterner man. He is so gentle. He is so good . . . I cannot understand how Mr. Kenneth Ross could venture to vex and anger him. But I rely on you: on *you*, entirely, dear Mr. Boyd, to smooth away all difficulties, and prevent Mr. Kenneth Ross from being injured, and Sir Douglas from being vexed; and I am sure you will manage this—for my sake!'

What if Lorimer Boyd winced under this appeal,—this placing *him* in the rank of a ‘second father,’ while it elevated Douglas Ross (his schoolfellow and contemporary) into a hero of romance and adored lover? No sigh escaped him; no shadow clouded his friendly smile; no extra pressure of the eager little white hand extended to him, told of a more than common and relied-on interest, in all that concerned Gertrude Skifton.

He undertook to reason with Kenneth; to endeavour to persuade him to travel; to do his best to spare a single pang to Sir Douglas; already in possession of a prospective happiness which might well repay, in Lorimer’s opinion, any amount of previous pain or sacrifice.

He left the Villa Mandorlo as the soft moonlight stole over its white walls and green verandas, with a heart at rest, as to his willingness to serve the gentle girl who bid him farewell in happy trust. And she sent her whispered blessing far through the moonlight across the blossoming almond-trees; down to the rippling sea which laved the shore where that Palazzo on the Chiaja covered in the unquiet night, passed by Sir Douglas by the couch of his nephew.

In the strength of youth and a good constitution, strong in spite of excess and fatigue, Kenneth struggled with the shock of his late rash attempt at suicide.

More fondly watched he could not be than by his uncle. Unconscious of all that had passed between Kenneth and Gertrude; attributing his state of mind merely to the pernicious habits which had taken possession of him; his fondness more sensitively alive than ever, after the horrible danger which had been averted, Sir Douglas sat alternately watching and reading by the bedside of the reckless young man; giving remedies; speaking from time to time in a soothing tone of tenderness which seemed to lull the half-conscious mind; waiting for clearer thought, and more exact answers, as to the grief of heart which had impelled him to that folly and sin.

No clue, however remote, to the real cause had reached Sir Douglas. As he gazed from time to time at the pallid, beautiful face, with the damp curls still clustering heavily round the brow, he pleased himself with a peaceful dream of the aid Gertrude might give hereafter to his efforts at reclaiming this prodigal; and imaged to himself her sweet irresistible voice pleading, even more successfully than he himself could plead, the cause of virtue, and the value of tranquil rational days.

Towards day-dawn Kenneth became entirely himself. Conscious, and miserable; conscious, and fiercely angry. To the gentle inquiries which hitherto had either received a confused response or none, he at length made fierce, sullen, but coherent replies.

'You think me drunk or wandering,' he said; 'you are mistaken! I have my senses as perfectly as you have yours. I know you. I know all your treachery and cruelty: all that you have plotted and contrived: all that your coming to Naples was intended to effect, and has effected. I know that, hearing of my love and Gertrude's beauty, you came here pre-determined to outwit me: that Lorimer Boyd has assisted you in every step you took. That, while you affected to be endeavouring to reform me, you were undermining the very roots by which I held to life: and, while you spoke to me of marriage, and a steady peaceful future, you were mocking me with a parcel of meaningless words.'

'Kenneth, Kenneth, my own poor lad, do try to be rational. I am here, beside you; longing to serve you; ready to make any sacrifice for you; loving you, in spite of all error, with as deep a love as ever one man felt for another. Trust me, my boy; trust me; tell me your vexations! Something more than common weighs upon you: if I can lift it away, do you think I will not do it? My dear lad, *try me.*'

As he spoke, he leaned eagerly, tenderly over the pillow, looking into those dim wild eyes, as if to read the thoughts of the speaker.

Kenneth closed them with a groan. Then, lifting the hot weary lids, with a fierce glance at his uncle, he muttered,—

'You mock me even now. I tell you, you have yourself ruined my destiny. You spoke to me of marriage, of reforming my life, of purity, of peace. You, you have deprived me of all chance of them. Gertrude Skifton was my dream of peace, and purity, and marriage, and you have taken her from me. She loved me. I know she loved me—till you came to poison her mind against me,—you who swore to protect me.'

'Kenneth,' said Sir Douglas, in a solemn tone, 'do not mock the name of love with such blasphemy, for the sake of vexing me! Do you forget that this very morning, in this very apartment, I saw the companions of your dissipated hour, and witnessed a scene incompatible with any thought of a future of peace and purity, such as you speak of desiring to attain?'

'What of that?' passionately exclaimed his nephew. 'Will you persuade me you yourself have lived the life of an anchorite,

pitching your tent for ever among preachers and puritans? I tell you, whatever you witnessed this morning, that I loved Gertrude Skifton; aye, and Gertrude Skifton loved *me*—and, if she has accepted you, it is because that worldly idiot, her mother, has persuaded her to do so; persuaded her that it is better than marrying me—a half-ruined man,—and nearly as good a thing as catching the Prince Colonna.

‘Good God!’ continued he, wildly, raising himself on his elbow, and looking fiercely in his uncle’s face—‘do you forget that we were together every day for two months before you ever came amongst us? Do you suppose I believe that you came all the way to Naples for me, and not for her? You lecture me; you preach to me; you tell me of my profligacy, my extravagance, and the Lord knows what besides. I choose for my wife a good, pure girl, of good family, with a fortune of her own, with everything that may give me a chance of rescue, and you come and take her from me. I tell you I curse the day you ever meddled with my affairs and me. I tell you, if you marry this girl, you are marrying the woman I love, and who loves *me*; loves *me*, not you, whatever she or her mother may persuade you to the contrary. Ask all Naples whom she was supposed to favour before you came between us! Ask your own conscience whether you have not sought to divide us, knowing that fact! Ask *her*, whom I reproached this morning, and whom I curse in my heart at this moment for her wanton caprice! I curse you both. I hope the pain at my heart may pour poison into yours; I hope Heaven will make a blight that shall fall on your marriage, if ever it does take place, and turn all that seemed to promise happiness, into gall, wormwood, and bitterness. I hope——’

‘O God, Kenneth—cease!’

It was all Sir Douglas could say. He said it with ashy, trembling lips. His face was as pale as that of the half-drowned man who cursed him now from his pillow.

It was all false; cruelly false; that he had known of this love,—that he had plotted against it,—that he had ‘outwitted’ his nephew. It was all false, he trusted (nay, knew), that Gertrude would accept him merely from ambition. Surely she might pretend to far, far greater rank and fortune than he could offer her! It was all false, that he came to Naples knowing of this intimacy. Of this Lorimer Boyd had spoken never a word in his letter.

But one thing remained true: and that one thing went near to break his heart. He was Kenneth’s rival. KENNETH! his petted, idolised, spoilt boy,—his more than child,—on whom he

had poured the double love bestowed on his dead brother and on himself.

The scene rose up before him of that brother's death-bed. Of the bruised, painful, groaning death ; of the wild fair woman ; of the little curly-headed child sitting at the pillow, smiling in his face, thinking he was the doctor come to cure all that shattered frame and restore his father ; of his brother's imploring prayer to protect little Kenneth, and not to disown him !

And now, there he lay—that curly-headed child,—a wayward angry man, just escaped, by God's mercy, from the crime of self-murder, and declaring his life blighted by the very man who had sworn to protect him.

Kenneth's rival !

Sir Douglas turned that bitter thought over and over in his mind ; watching through the comfortless night,—long after opiates and exhaustion had quieted that bitter tongue, and given temporary peace to that perturbed heart.

Kenneth's rival !

How to escape from that one strange, depressing thought ! how to make all those reproaches seem vague and senseless, as the sound of the storm-wind sweeping over the surging sea !

In the morning he would see Gertrude ; she would speak of this ; they would consult together ; something might then be contrived and executed to soothe and save Kenneth. Till he saw Gertrude, Sir Douglas would resolve on nothing.

But, when the morning came, and the bright, early day permitted him, after the restless hours of that long long night, to seek the home that sheltered her more peaceful slumbers—she told him nothing !

The serene loving eyes again lifted to his face, seemed without a secret in their transparent depths ; and yet, of all that stormy yesterday,—that scene of reproach which Kenneth had vaguely alluded to, not a word was breathed.

Sir Douglas would not ask her. His heart seemed to choke in his breast as often as he thought to frame the words that might solve his doubts. Was it all delirium ? Was it possible Kenneth had so much 'method in his madness' as to rave of scenes that never took place, and feelings that were imaginary ?

Was it a dream ? or had Sir Douglas indeed passed this wretched night, cursed by the being he had loved better than all else in the world till he met with Gertrude ? If it was not a dream, what could he do ? How extricate himself from the position of grief ?

Almost, when Gertrude said tenderly, 'You look so weary, I cannot bear to think of the night you must have gone through,'—*almost* the answer burst forth—'Yes, it has been a bitter night! Is it true? Oh! tell me if it is true? Am I poor Kenneth's rival?'

But the soft eyes, in their undisturbed love, dwelling quietly on him, on her mother, on all objects round her, seemed for ever to lull the wild question away.

He would stay with Gertrude till it was likely Kenneth would be awake and stirring, after all the exhaustion and the long slumber that follows an opiate; and then he would have a quieter explanation with that young angry mind, and learn how much or how little was unremembered delirium, and how much was truth, in the ravings of the night before.

Gertrude walked with him through the long pergola, under the trailing vines, out to the very verge of the seaward terrace, from whence, by a rocky path, a short cut would lead him to the Chiaja.

He looked back after they had parted, and saw her still watching him: the tender smile still lingered on her lips; her folded arms rested on the low marble wall which bounded the terrace. The morning light fell in all its freshness on her candid brow and wavy chestnut hair, and deepened into sunshine while he gazed.

It was an attitude of peace and tranquil love. He paused for a few seconds to contemplate her; returned her smile (somewhat sadly), and hastened onwards to greet Kenneth at his wakening: for it was now some hours since he had left him, and Sir Douglas felt restless till some more intelligible explanation should succeed the frenzy of the night before.

CHAPTER XIII.

TROUBLED JOYS.

THERE are days in life during which, though we have all our senses about us, we seem to be walking in a bad dream; and such was the sensation with which Sir Douglas retraced his steps that morning. Outward objects made no impression. The beauty of the scenery, the tumultuous stir of the population, the greeting of casual acquaintances, alike passed unheeded. He was what is not unaptly termed, 'buried in thought.'

Deep and dark is that burial ; but it is not calm, like death. The quick blood beat at his heart, and throbbed in his temples. It was almost with a feeling of joyful refreshment that his mind woke, at last, to a perception of visible and earthly things, under the influence of one of those sudden storms that visit the Mediterranean. The rain came in heavy drops, in drifting streams ; the sea changed from blue to green, from green to purple, and sent its waves, fringed with wrathful foam, dashing from the bay over the shore, to crown with a mixture of silver and snow the heads of the stunted trees that grow in a formal line along the Villa Reale. In that change he breathed more freely.

He stood for a few minutes gazing at the scene, bare-headed : his cloak fluttering in the wild wind—as he used to love to stand on the hills above Glenrossie when he came back, an eager boy, for his Eton holidays. The pain at his heart seemed lightened. The demon of doubt which oppressed him (though he was scarcely conscious of his cause of torment) made itself wings and went out into the storm. As he ascended the staircase of the Palazzo he met Lorimer Boyd coming down. ‘He is asleep and doing well,’ said the latter as he grasped his old friend by the hand. Then he passed rapidly down, and Sir Douglas proceeded to his nephew’s room.

The peace of sleep is nearly as beautiful as the peace of death—nearly as beautiful as that unutterable calm whose placidity awes us when we sob over our lost ones, and compels us to pause in our weeping, and gaze on the face whose many changes were so familiar and so dear ; yearning for a break in that calm ; a quiver in that strange set smile ; something that shall seem human and sympathetic—something, we know not what, that will not freeze us with such intense conviction that the smiles and tears, and sunshine and shadow, of earth’s emotions are over ; and that what we loved has passed away to the world where there is no more change !

Pale and peaceful, without a cloud on the young smooth forehead ; recovering, apparently, from all evil effects of yesterday’s events as quietly as a convalescent child ; thus it was that Sir Douglas found his nephew. A little fluttering tremor in breathing, coming now and then like a light movement of leaves in spring weather, alone spoke of past disturbance. His uncle sat down once more where he had watched during the preceding night, and watched again—and so watching, ceased to think of himself, and thought entirely and only of Kenneth. How nearly he had lost him : how horrible this

day would have been, if the young man who lay there in stillness and shadow was DEAD instead of sleeping!

Thinking of all this with a tender heart, the watcher bent forwards to the slumberer, and kissed his cheek. Gently as that kiss was given, it seemed to rouse the dormant faculty of thought; the expression of pain and anger flickered anew over the features; the short savage laugh which Kenneth laughed when he was provoked, sounded feebly from his lips; and he muttered, 'No, Gertrude, no—

"Come not to weep for me when I am gone,
Nor drop your foolish tears upon my grave:"

'there's a true poet's true thought for you! Where—where is—where am I?'

With the last words Kenneth looked round wildly, uncomfortably.

'I thought she was here,' he said: 'women are such fools! But she is not fool enough for that;' and the same laugh, painful to listen to, was repeated.

'Kenneth, I do adjure you, if ever you felt affection for me, try and collect yourself, and be frank with me, instead of making my heart ache with your wild sayings.'

The lip of the speaker quivered as he spoke, and he looked at the young face with almost piteous appeal. But Kenneth only laughed again more bitterly.

'Your heart ache!' he said. 'Well, that is good! what is it, another of your rhymesters says,—"condemned alike to groan!"—It's all fair, you know—"alike to groan." You say, let's talk of Gertrude Skifton; I say d——n her, don't let's think any more about her! The poet says,—Do you know that your friend, Lorimer Boyd, is a poet? Fact. A sonnet to his mistress's eyebrow. I said, when I read it, "Well, my dear fellow, go in and win—if you can." He can't, my dear uncle—because—Good God, what is that?' exclaimed he, suddenly interrupting himself: 'that—that figure in white? It is not Gertrude; I thought at first it was Gertrude,—it's more like Lady Charlotte, but it's a drowned woman—ha, ha, ha; some one has pitched her out of the boat! No—I declare it—it is my mother; don't you see it?—strike at it. Go round and sit there—hinder those things from crowding round me: there's a crocodile lifting its snout out of the water on to the bed. I thought crocodiles lived in the Nile; I—I never saw one before—help, uncle, help!'

The thread of thought was broken. From this time, for many

days, Kenneth merely raved. In his ravings the most insolent reproaches to Gertrude, to Lady Charlotte, were mingled with the most passionate declarations of love; and promises, if she would abide by him, to 'lead a new life,' and be a different creature. At one period he seemed to consider that she had consented, and that Sir Douglas had returned to Scotland.

'Now we shall be happy,' he said; 'I don't wish him dead—I never wished Old Sir Douglas dead; but I'm glad he's gone. I hope he's gone for ever. I hope I shall never see him again—never—never—never! We'll go where he can't follow, over the sea, under the sea; I've been under the sea. It is beautiful, only there are crocodiles and sea-serpents, and strange dreadful things—'

And then again, the delirium of fear would seize him, and the suffering, while it broke Sir Douglas's heart to witness, would take a form yet more painful and terrible, as it diverged yet farther and farther from the realms of reason and probability.

The best medical advice could do little in a case like Kenneth's. The disturbed brain must suffer its miserable fever, the disease must 'run its course,' and then those who cared for the prolongation of that erring life must trust to the great mysterious chance of 'strength of constitution' to carry him safe past the storm of that trial into some haven of quiet and health.

And into that haven sailed the storm-beaten bark of life; in spite of rent and shattered sails. Kenneth was pronounced 'out of danger,' 'convalescent,' 'nearly as usual.' Friends congratulated, companions came to see him. The sounds of laughter and common conversation were once more heard in that silent woe-begone chamber. The sunshine of glorious Italy was once more allowed to send rippling smiles over the uncarpeted floor. The hour of suffering was past,—as far as bodily suffering was concerned.

But the mental suffering, which Sir Douglas had endured, was not past. In the long dreary hours of his steady and patient watches by that bedside; all the knowledge that his nephew was delirious, all the comfort mixed with pain which such knowledge brought, could not avail entirely to smother the conviction that something had in very deed and truth occurred between him and Gertrude Skifton; some love-passage, some declaration accepted or rejected, of which Sir Douglas had never been informed by his betrothed wife.

Frank by nature, and frank on principle; loving truth as all noble natures love it, and holding it as the first of religious virtues; his soul shuddered at the sorrowful doubt that sometimes overshadowed him. He used to rise, after listening to Kenneth's ravings, and go

with rapid impatience to the Villa Mandorlo, determined to put this doubt to the test; to question Gertrude; to clear up the mystery of this disturbance. And then would come the revulsion. Question her? If it could be necessary to *question*; if, in the relative position in which they stood towards each other, confidence was not spontaneous; would it lessen his grief to wring from her any answer? Would that answer be guarded and cold? Would she resent being doubted, and account for it all?

He was haunted by her sudden exclamation in the boat, the day that Kenneth tempted Providence by leaping from it into the waves. 'Oh, this is *my* fault,' she had said—'my fault! Save him! save him!'

How was it her fault, if Kenneth had not in some way been justified in reckoning on her love? How otherwise could it be her fault? Once only, (bitter once!) had the subject been broached between them; and her answer only added to Sir Douglas's perplexity. It was after a series of more than usually virulent and scornful outbursts from Kenneth, through feverish hours of rambling, that Sir Douglas, jaded and weary, had entered at the open door from the terrace into the room where Gertrude sat absorbed in thought. She started when conscious of his approach; and looking at him with sorrowful tenderness, said, 'I should not have recognised your step, it was so slow! Oh, you will be ill yourself—I am sure you will. Is Kenneth very bad, very wild to-day?'

'Yes, Gertrude, very wild! He has been raving of many things. Hard bitter reproaches to me, who have done him no conscious wrong. Hard, bitter reproaches to others—to YOU—to your mother. I wish——'

What he wished he could not say; he stopped in agitation, only to see how agitated Gertrude was. She did not lift those unequalled eyes to his face as was her wont; she looked down: she trembled: she stretched out both her hands with a sort of blind groping for his, which she held almost convulsively in her own.

'Oh, do not believe him,' she said; 'you know he is delirious! He loves and honours you; he has no other thought: people speak exactly the reverse of their real sentiments in these illnesses. I heard the doctor say so. He would not vex or harm you for the world, when he is himself. And as for me,' she faltered, 'I am sure he should not reproach me; I have no wish but for his good.'

How could she shape her sentences so as to satisfy this generous heart? How tell him that in the wild appeal for love made to her

by that reckless nephew, his final phrase had been that he would stab his uncle in the public street? Her part was surely to soothe and reconcile all differences: to conceal all bitterness: not to set the uncle against the beloved nephew by repeating frantic words, spoken perhaps in the incipient stage of this dreadful malady. Was she not already indeed the cause, the involuntary cause, of disaster and disappointment to Kenneth? Not so much with reference to his supposed love for her,—which she herself looked upon as a wayward passing fancy,—but with reference to his prospects in life. Was she not building up her own happiness on a sort of downfall of his previous expectations? No longer to be his uncle's heir, no longer his first object; she herself to be that first object, and perhaps mother to sons dearer than even he had ever been to the loving heart that beat beside her.

Trembling, flushed, shy with a thousand such crowding thoughts, Gertrude struggled through her conversation with Sir Douglas; adjuring him above all things to try and spare himself so much fatigue; advising him 'not to sit always listening to painful things when it could do Kenneth no good.' Till at length, when Sir Douglas rose to leave her, she crept a little closer to him, and murmured once more,—‘And remember *all* he says is delirium!’

Sir Douglas was tall, and in their farewells Gertrude had a pretty customary shyness of bowing her head beneath his, to receive his parting caress. As they stood together now, with clasped hands, she moved her head gently towards him: but the lips that were wont so fondly to press the glossy chestnut hair, refrained from their habitual salute. His hand wrung hers, with something more of grief than love: and when she looked up she saw his eyes full of troubled tears.

‘Oh, Heaven!’ she said, ‘you are quite worn out! Do not sit with Kenneth! Do not listen to him! Do not trust a word he says in such an illness as this! Leave the nurse with him, this one night, and come back and let me sing to you in the evening. The first time I ever saw you, I was singing!’

Sir Douglas sighed painfully. He, too, remembered that night. Kenneth was in attendance upon her then. It was he who had accompanied his uncle for the first time to her home. He was turning over the leaves of her music-book, when she asked who the stranger was, and received the audible reply, that it was Kenneth's uncle, ‘Old Sir Douglas.’ The scene rose like a vision before him. He saw the slender handsome youth standing by the instrument; and

the girl whose soft glance had been lifted to his and then withdrawn, in the embarrassment of being overheard in her questioning; an embarrassment which he recollected sharing. A pang shot through his heart, sharper than any that had yet visited it. Was it not more natural that these young companions should love each other, than that Gertrude should lean across the gap of years that sundered her from himself, and prefer him to one whose faults she could not know, and whose advantages were so many?

All of a sudden he seemed to grow old, as in a fairy tale! Memory flew back through crowded adventures. Midnight fields of silence, after battles fought in foreign lands. The deaths, long, long ago, of companions in arms, whose children were now grown up, whose widows were remarried; the mourning for whom was a forgotten thing. Passionate fancies that had tempted his youth: some bravely withstood, some yielded to and repented of, but all so far away in the vista of the irrevocable past; all so long, so *very* long ago!

Almost he felt ashamed of the sudden choice, the rash avowal, the witchery that had enslaved him to the young girl, who, it was true, he had seen daily since his coming to Naples, but who, two months ago, was a stranger to him! Was it thus, that a man in mature life, should choose a companion for the remainder of his days? Had he done selfishly, blindly?

Thought is a thousand-fold more rapid than words. Scarcely had he held the little taper fingers in his own without speaking, long enough for her to wonder at his silence, before all this and more had passed through his aching brain. An exclamation, almost a moan, escaped his lips, ere he at length pressed them fervently on her forehead. One sole idea,—that he was ill,—possessed Gertrude. For the first time she returned his caress; twined her arms round his neck, as if to bring the dear head nearer; and murmured passionately, ‘If you won’t take care for your own sake—take care for mine! What will become of me, if you are ill without me?’

That evening Kenneth was left to the nurse. Not for long: the night-watch was still kept: but during the clear and lovely evening, Sir Douglas sat and listened to Gertrude’s singing; watching the mouth that sang, and the shadowy, downcast eyes that seemed to dream over the notes.

He gazed and listened. He told himself he did not doubt her. To doubt her was not possible. Yet he felt sad; the old classic fables taught to him in his boyhood, rose as if to mock him; and

the story of the Sirens disturbed his mind, even while he told it to Gertrude, and laughed.

She watched him after their farowell, as he passed darkly through the moonlight, down the shelving tiers of terraces. 'Yes,' she said to herself, 'I do right. It is better he should never know. We shall all have to live much together. He must not learn to think of Kenneth with aught but love and trust. And Kenneth himself will grow to think of all as a dream. But oh! how I longed to have no thought hidden from him: to tell him all: and what a pain it is to feel that it cannot be!'

And then her mother, who also had watched that receding form, turned and kissed the flushed cheek where still burned the touch of a more disturbing caress.

'Well, dear,' said Lady Charlotte, 'You know your own heart best; but I don't think I ever could love Sir Douglas! I never could feel *au niveau* of him, you know. I have observed that you never feel that. You feel *au niveau* of everybody, I believe. But I should be a little—just a very little—afraid of him, you know.'

'Should you, darling mother?' said Gertrude, dreamily,—'I think him perfect! My wonder is that he could choose *me*: he must have seen so many far worthier than I am to be his wife.'

And the young girl's fancy also wandered blindly into Sir Douglas's past. Who had filled it with woman's great event of life,—Love? Whom had he loved before he met her?—*in his youth*? And Gertrude felt that somehow his youth lay far away from hers: as *he* had felt, at their earlier meeting that same day.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND AND A LOVER.

THE days rolled on. The doctor who had attended Kenneth especially impressed on Sir Douglas and all friends that his main safety lay in tranquillity. Nothing was to be said or done that could call back disturbance to his mind. No lecturing on pernicious habits of late hours and reckless dissipation; no allusions to the attempt at self-destruction; no contradiction; no reference to any *affaire du cœur* the young man might have; and which the doctor took for granted, after hearing some of his vague ravings, was a

point of discussion between him and his uncle. All was to be placid around him ; and, as far as was practicable with his restless nature, he was to be made to share that placidity.

And so it came to pass that Gertrude's name was no more mentioned between them. No doubt Kenneth knew, when his uncle's frank countenance became clouded and wistful, that he was 'casting about' how to ask that which he nevertheless dreaded to hear. And no doubt Sir Douglas, when the brow of his nephew grew dark with an expression of dislike and distrust, felt instinctively that he was brooding over his imaginary wrongs in that respect, and paining his kindly relative by all sorts of cruel suspicions which, however undeserved, no explanation would be permitted to remove.

It was nevertheless a day of joy to both, when first Kenneth feebly descended the great stone staircase, and crossed from the Palazzo to the Villa Reale ; leaning on his uncle's arm, and looking with dazed languid eyes at the million smiles of the rippling sea, and the fishermen's boats in the bay. And day by day, as his strength returned in slow measure, the same loving arm and patient heart were ready to give what help and solace body or mind was capable of receiving.

Only once they met Gertrude and her mother. Weary of the sights and sounds of the ever-restless Chiaja ; of the rushing past of calessos and carriages ; of the shrill voices of petty vendors of roasted chestnuts, melons, sea-fish, and 'sea-fruit,' (as the little brown urchins call the nondescript creatures which, warm from the palms of their own dirty little hands, they propose to the stranger to buy and devour,) sick of the monotony of mingling with the stream of that life which he saw every day at a distance from the windows of his apartment—Kenneth requested to be driven to Baïæ.

At that turn in the road which presents the unequalled view of the bay and the Island of Nisida, they halted and gazed on the scene, bathed in an aureole of golden sunset : and fell to talking of Italian prisons and Italian liberty—as many an Englishman has done, and will do again, in that spot of beauty and misery—

'Where all save the spirit of man is divine.'

Kenneth became excited, and then rather faint. There was a pause ; and then, in a wilful peevish tone, he said, 'I don't know why we talk of these accursed things ; let us go on the sands, a little further on ; I am quite able for that : in fact, I am sure a walk on the sands would do me good : and there, at least, there

will be no shouting; no babble except the lapping of the little waves. I want to be alone; we shall be alone there.'

And lone enough the curved outline of the white sandy shore appeared in the distance; but hardly had they left the carriage a few yards behind them, when, at a sudden turn, they came face to face with Lady Charlotte Skifton and her daughter.

'Dear me!' said the former, 'we came here because we thought we should meet nobody; and who should we meet but the very persons——'

'Whom you were anxious to avoid?' said Kenneth, with a short laugh.

'No, indeed, nothing of the kind, I'm sure, Mr. Ross; and I'm extremely glad, on the contrary, to see you looking so much recovered; but the very persons we were talking about; for I was speaking of Sir Douglas to Gertie.'

'I hope you spoke in praise of me,' said the latter, with an attempt at playfulness, and an anxious glance at Gertrude.

'Oh, no!—I mean yes, of course—but, indeed, we were like the city of Zoar, you know; neither hot nor cold—he, he, he,—I mean neither praising nor blaming—but just talking you over, and how ill you looked, and all that.'

Gertrude did not speak. She had offered her hand to Kenneth, who did not take it; and she extend'd it to Sir Douglas and withdrew it again, his eyes being now fixed on his nephew, apparently unconscious of her movement. Gertrude flushed painfully; Kenneth turned very pale: Sir Douglas strove in vain for a free and unembarrassed address. All stood silent.

'Oh, dear!' said Lady Charlotte, 'I shall have to behave like the child's book; I mean like the story; that is, like the old woman in the story, where the stick begins to beat the dog; and the dog begins to bite the rope—and—oh, dear! I can't remember how it goes on: but Gertrude will remember it all; she used to say it by heart when she was a little child. I know, however, that all was set a-going that they might get home, you know, as we must!'

• "Pig won't get over the stile, and I shan't get home to-night,—"
that is the nursery rhyme.'

The girlish giggle with which she repeated the verse, and the twirl she gave to the long ringlet, and all the little shades of ridicule that attached to all she said and did, were rather a relief than otherwise in the embarrassment of the moment. Kenneth laughed, and

leaning heavily on his uncle's arm, made way for her to pass him. He even held out his hand to Gertrude; pressed hers; and then retreating a step backwards, muttered 'I don't feel well; I should like to return to the carriage.'

Not a word did he speak during the drive homewards, and Sir Douglas forbore to chafe his spirit by any attempt at conversation. But each was aware of a shadow that fell over all objects as they drove along; and the few words spoken at parting were spoken with constraint, although on Sir Douglas's part they were only a promise to see him in the morning, and on Kenneth's 'Very well; yes; good-bye for the present.'

Then came again, for Sir Douglas, the mingled pain and pleasure of his quiet loving evening at the Villa Mandorlo. Lorimer Boyd was sitting with Gertrude when he came in. They were looking over maps in a small atlas that lay on the table.

'Are you teaching Gertrude geography?' asked Sir Douglas with a smile.

'I should want many lessons, I am afraid,' answered she, shutting the book hurriedly; 'but Mr. Boyd would have plenty of patience with me.'

They chatted a while together, and then Lorimer Boyd took his leave. Lady Charlotte lay drowsily reading a little French novel on a sofa in the distance. Sir Douglas and his betrothed talked of Scotland; of his home; of the past; of the future; of wood-walks and mountain-walks which they were to take together; of all the good she was to do; and all the happiness she was to confer.

All of a sudden,—and, as it seemed to the startled girl, quite unaccountably,—in the midst of a description of Torrieburn Falls, his voice broke; and in a smothered and passionate tone, he said;—

'Oh, Gertrude! my Gertrude! do you know the meaning of your name? It means TRUE—true to your trust! There was a German Gertrude one, who clung through good and evil to her husband; and when, for some political offence, he was sentenced to be broken on the wheel, she sat by him through the long night, moistening his lips in the torture of that terrible death, and speaking words of comfort to the last! *That* was love.'

'Do you fear, that if such a fate were possible for you, I should forsake you, Douglas?'

'There are tortures, not of the body,—of the mind,—as difficult to bear.'

There was a pause. 'You are thinking once more of Kenneth,' said Gertrude, gently.

'Yes, of Kenneth,' he answered, eagerly; and eagerly he watched her face, for he thought to himself, 'Now she will speak.'

But she turned away from his searching gaze, and sighed. Then turning towards him again with a sweet sad look, her eyes fell on his eyes, and she said rather reproachfully, 'I have very little power over you, you rebellious lover; did I not tell you not to dwell on things said by poor Kenneth? that all was delirium!'

All? Was *all* delirium? That was exactly what Sir Douglas panted to know.

And Gertrude, believing that all that disturbed his mind must be a repetition of vague, angry threats,—not with any special reference to her, or connected with any confession of love for her, but resulting from a general spirit of rebellion on the part of Kenneth against his uncle,—thought she did wisely and well in keeping her secret, and not permitting love for herself to sunder the love of those who had been so linked together; and with both of whom—not with Sir Douglas only—her future life must be connected, if she did her duty by all as she hoped to do.

When Sir Douglas bid her good night she looked wistfully in his face. 'Come early to-morrow,' she said, 'Mamma is not well. Come early to-morrow.'

'Yes; as soon as I have seen Kenneth.'

He was gone. And yet Gertrude did not retire to rest. Nor did she read or work or occupy herself in any way. Her mother kissed her languidly, with a little yawn, and a 'Don't sit up, dear; dream in your bed, if you will dream.' But she did not obey the mandate. She sat watching and listening. She opened the glass doors that led to the terraces; the warm night air breathed like a caress on her cheek and shoulder as she leaned against the trellis-work, rich with the perfume of flowers. Presently a hurried step approached from the distance, and Lorimer Boyd returned.

'Have you seen him and talked to him?' whispered Gertrude.

'Yes.'

'And how did he take it?'

'Very badly at first; he was wild and menacing and foolish, but sensible enough at last.'

'He agreed?'

'Yes, he agreed. I found great difficulty in convincing him that it really was your wish, and he conditioned with me to bring him back one word from you—one written line as a proof. You are to

write, "Farewell Kenneth. It is better for you and for me ; we are not parting for ever, only for a time."

'I will write it directly—only'—she hesitated, 'only let him clearly understand that, when we do meet again, I shall be a wife.'

'Of course,' said Lorimer Boyd hurriedly, and without looking towards her. 'Give me the note, and I will return to him.'

She took the pen. 'I cannot call him Kenneth. I have always called him Mr. Ross. Mamma sometimes has called him by his Christian name, but I have not.'

"Farewell, Kenneth Ross," then ; the main thing at this special time is to soothe him, if you wish him to agree to the plan proposed. Each man has his own distinct way of grieving. Trust me, if you were to write me a farewell in such circumstances, I would care little in what words it was couched. But he is wilful—different.'

'Farewell, Kenneth Ross. It is better for you,—for me,—she hesitated over some mention of Sir Douglas, and wrote 'for you,—for me,—for *all*. We are parting only for a time. not for ever. Take care of your health. Yours always most truly—G. S.'

'There, give it to him. How can I thank you for all the trouble you take ? But I know you think nothing of that, not only for my sake, but for the sake of an older friend—Sir Douglas himself.'

'Yes ; for your sake and his. God bless you ; God bless you both, and give you both what happiness is attainable in this strange unstable world. Good-night.'

'Good-night,' answered the soft musical voice, and the sweet eyes were lifted to his with a fond thankful expression. And the good-night words and good-night glance went on with Lorimer Boyd through the lonely pathway, to his final task for that evening by Kenneth's restless side, and into the solitude of his own habitation, where he could commune with his heart and be still.

Long he sat ; his arms folded across his broad chest ; his gaze abstractedly fixed on a litter of torn papers, and books of reference, heaped by his writing-table ; wrapt in moody contemplation. The taper, burning by him on the desk, sank suddenly, and startled him from his reverie. He lit another at the dying flame, and rose to go to his bed-room. As he passed one of the tall mirrors let into the wall, and saw the spectre of himself reflected there with a sudden illumination, his lip curled with a grim smile.

‘Well, thought he, ‘Kenneth Ross was an Adonis, if any man could lay claim to the title, and yet——’

And so he passed to the shadow of slumber and the land of dreams, whither we cannot follow him.

CHAPTER XV.

SANS ADIEU.

EARLY morning in the Bay of Naples! Have any of my readers seen it? Do they remember it? Can they forget it? Did the seeing of it seem to justify the boastful national saying, ‘See Naples, and then die?’

The brightness of land and water; the beauty of outline, and of the vegetation that fills up those outlines; the glitter of white, green, scarlet, purple; and blue; of villas and palaces; gay vestments; snowy lateen sails, shooting like sudden smiles across the face of the sea; all the glory of nature that hides, as with a bright screen, dirt, ignorance, poverty, misgovernment, and whatever else is faulty or painful in the condition of that careless people, for whom brave hearts have struggled and suffered, and are yet struggling: but who, in their whole nature, resemble ill-brought-up children more than any other peasantry on the face of the globe. Even in their bursts of daring effort to right themselves politically, this may be seen. Our English Wat Tyler—the ‘Idol of the Clowns,’ as he is styled in old-fashioned accounts of that rebellion,—and William Tell, the hero of Helvetic romance,—rose, with men’s hearts, to do men’s work; with a steady purpose, and, as far as is possible in ambitious human nature, with a certain abnegation of self in behalf of the general good. But Massaniello’s revolt, touching as is his story, was the barring-out of a school-boy sick of a tyrannical master; tyrannical in his turn, and rebelled against in his turn, by companions yet more reckless and short-sighted than himself.

* Even in their daily occupations—their slack uncertain industry, easily interrupted for any show or procession; their ceaseless inattentive gabble; their vehement disputes about trifles, when they should be seriously bent on the business of the hour,—this childishness is observable. Life, with them, seems a filling up of some

irregular ill-passed holiday,—a holiday that has been too long even for their own comfort, as we often see with children. There is no evidence of reality in what they do. They seem playing at everything. Playing at buying and selling; playing at mending nets; playing at oratory in one corner, and at building or carpenter's work in another. Even the women seem playing at washing, as they chase each other laughingly, or come carelessly along, swinging a basket of wet linen between them, passing barefooted over the bright sands, whose moist gleaming surface on a sunny day often reflects, as in a mirror, the feet and limbs and coloured raiment of the burden-carriers.

Their little nasal songs are the songs of children—monotonous, unfinished, with seldom as much thought and poetry as one Sir Douglas Ross smiled at, this special morning, as he wended his way to Kenneth's home, lingering and looking about him, enjoying the brightness and glory of that careless opening day.

The song he paused to listen to was a corrupted version, very nasally sung, of a little poem by Tommaso Tommasi; not in the style of the grand yet sweet poetic line of the ever-wailing Petrarch, 'Blessed be the time, the season, the hour;' but with a tinge of comic humour in its tenderness.

'My blessing' (so it ran) 'on the builder who built that house! My hearty blessing be upon him! many blessings in truth—many! Bless him for building that door, out of which you come, and into which I go! Bless him for framing that window, where I often see your dear face looking out! But above all may he be blest a thousand times over for making that nice little staircase, up which I can pass when I will, to see you and embrace you.'

The singer was a little brown urchin, so young that even in precocious Italy he could scarcely be supposed as yet to have any reason for blessing one architect more than another for enabling him to visit his love! He was perched astride on the keel of an upturned boat; his scarlet cap carelessly held in his hands, which rested on the boat in front of him, as he sat, jockey fashion, carolling his ditty with eager lungs, like a bird in the morning sun.

Sir Douglas tossed him a small piece of silver, which he caught in his cap with a nod and a merry grin, but without dismounting from his throne on the keel. Beyond him sat a girl, (his sister apparently, from the resemblance between them), weeping bitterly, and he leaned back with a wild grace, and made her an offer of the coin; repeating the ever-ready phrase of childhood to those in sorrow—'Weep no more!' But the girl continued sobbing; her

breast heaved convulsively in its crimson bodice, and she was vainly stanch'ng, with her stiff little embroidered apron, tears which fell without ceasing from most beautiful eyes—eyes whose lids seemed rather to be fringed with feathers from a bird's wing than furnished with ordinary lashes, so thick and soft lay their shadow on her cheek.

At first Sir Douglas had made a movement to add to his benefaction, but he somehow intuitively felt that here was a sorrow which no amount of silver coin, nor even gold coin, could avail to comfort. He approached the stranded boat, and spoke a few words of compassion and inquiry. The boy slid down from his place, and drew his sister's hand away from her face, that she might attend to the stranger; but, instead of answering, she also slid down, lithe as a branch of broken woodbine, and hastily flitted away over the sands. He could see her, still weeping; repulsing, with a little movement of her shoulder, the attempted consolations of some companions who crossed her path and turned pityingly towards her; till, spying in the distance the gaunt figure of an old weather-beaten woman, she ran rapidly forwards to meet her, and flung herself into the circling arms. Then both women, as of common accord, dropped down to the sands, and again embracing as they seated themselves, wept in concert.

'E la madra di Guiseppe!' muttered the boy, his own glittering black eyes suffused for a moment with sympathetic tears.

'And where is Giuseppe?'

The boy pointed to the smoke of a steam-packet, trailing quietly on the calm air far out in the bay.

'And is he your brother?'

No; he was the lover of Nanella—(this was told in the simplest way in the world)—and yesterday they were all as happy as possible, sailing in that very boat. And the boy gave a little kick backwards with his bare brown heel on the boat's side, as he stood leaning against it and facing the inquisitive stranger, to impress the situation on Sir Douglas.

Yes! all so happy only yesterday, and Nanella to be married in three days from this time; and now, as the saints and Madonna had permitted, Giuseppe had been tempted by the offers of a 'richissimo signor Inglese' to accompany him; had left Nanella and Naples and his mother, and had his head full of dreams of making a fine fortune, and not to be a fisherman any longer.

'But he will return, and then marry your sister, if he has a true heart.'

'Ah, signor! but sometimes from the sea one does not return at all, and the hearts, whether false or true, lie deep among the fishes! So Giuseppe's father lay,—after a great storm,—and therefore the old mother and Nanella weep. For my part' (and the glitter of the Southern smile returned to the boy's noble countenance)—'for my part, I only envy Giuseppe; it must be a grand thing to sail far, far, far away, and see strange people and ships, and bring home strange birds! Ah! if any great signor—if, for example, your Excellency—would say to me, "Pepe, let us sail away together," how readily would I say, Yes, let us go—andiam, partiam!' He gave an indolent look towards the sea, and then added, laughing, 'It would not at least be my baggage that would detain me! Such *baule* as I saw lifted on the deck of the steamer before she was off! such shouting and scuffling, such tossing about of lights—for she was off at dawn of day, and there was much loading to be done first. I am sure Giuseppe alone lifted thirteen boxes. But I—ah! that would be another affair; I should take a slice of melon in my hand, and step on board, and say to the Excellency,—*Eccomi!*' *

'I have a great mind to take you at your word,' said Sir Douglas, laughing, as he looked on the little careless lad, who evidently thought it rather a convenience than otherwise to have what our shivering Northern mendicants term 'nothing but what he stood upright in.' 'I have a great mind to take you with me to a very cold country, where I live when I am at home; but we must talk of it another time; the mother and Nanella would cry still more if you left them.'

'Oh no, signor, Nanella would not care. Do take me!'

And he followed Sir Douglas a few steps, as if hoping that his future destiny would be settled then and there, in another sentence or two.

'No, no. I will think of it. Go now—do not follow me. Go and comfort Nanella.'

The little fisher-boy shook his head. Then he slowly returned to his boat, and casting himself on the sands was soon engaged in that lively game, the '*gioco del moro*,' with companions as little in need of portmanteaus and *baule* to pack their clothes in, as his half-naked self; and quite as ready for any chance start in life: while Sir Douglas quickened his steps to reach the Palazzo on the Chiaja, —musing as he went on the contrasts of sorrow in luxury,—such as existed there; and sorrow in poverty,—such as he had just left.

Upon the whole, Heaven's visitations are more even than they seem. The golden shields of heroes, embossed and decorated and worked with strange devices, protected life no better than the common soldier's; and the arrows of fate still strike home to the heart, whether the breast lie bare to the sunshine like poor little Pepe's, or be clothed in 'purple and fine linen.'

Nothing could be more commonplace than these reflections of Sir Douglas's: but they are commonplace because they are universally true; and they absorbed him so entirely, that he was still occupied with the immense despair caused by the departure of some obscure and nameless fisherman in the hearts of that girl and woman weeping on the sands, when the last step of the staircase was reached, and he stood on the landing of Kenneth's apartment.

The door of that apartment was wide open; and, as he entered, Sir Douglas was startled by the peculiar aspect of the rooms. Every one knows the look of rooms from which the habitual occupant has just flitted. The torn nest of a bird does not tell its story more clearly. 'Packed up and gone away,' is written on all the little nameless shreds of litter—the scraps of paper and string; the chairs standing in unusually irregular positions; the beds unmade because about to be stripped; the doors all ajar; and the odd silence that seems to pervade the place where customary voices sound no longer: all seeming dumbly to impress upon us, 'Those you seek *were* here, but they have departed!'

Only a minute or two of bewilderment elapsed before another step sounded on the bare stone staircase, and the conceited cigar-smoking valet, whom Sir Douglas recollected on his first visit to Kenneth, entered; extremely moody and crestfallen.

'Where is your master?' asked Sir Douglas.

'Eh! Chi lo sa!' All he knew was that the young Excellency had asked for the accounts the previous evening; had scarcely looked at them, saying that he had much headache that night; had paid him without a word, and had bid him pack up his things immediately! That at first he had thought the young Excellency was again in delirium, but that he insisted, and the Signor Boyd, who had been with the young Excellency, had remarked nothing extraordinary; but bid him good night as usual after much talk.

That he had accordingly obeyed, and packed all but his Excellency's music, which his Excellency angrily said he did not want, and in fact struck the guitar so passionately that it 'burst asunder with a great sound.' That after all this, the young Excellency's things were carried down to the port and put on the boats to be

carried to one of the large steamers; and that at the very last moment, when the valet was preparing also to add his own things, gathered together as he averred in most uncomfortable haste, the young Excellency had told him he need give himself no such trouble, for that he intended to take with him Giuseppe, the coral-diver, who had fished him out of the water the day his Excellency might remember,—the day of the accident which was followed by the dreadful illness from which the young Excellency was only just recovered. That Giuseppe had only laughed at the expostulation made by him—the valet—and had said that he would nurse the Signor Inglese as if he were a baby at the breast, and that he did not require any more a valet who was not a courier, nor a courier who was not a sailor. And any more than these particulars he, the valet, could not narrate, being ‘stordito’ with all that had occurred, and knowing no more than he had had the honour to explain to his Excellency.

Was there no note—no message? Sir Douglas asked. Did Mr. Kenneth Ross not mention *him* before starting?

Not a word. There was indeed a note; but to Mr. Boyd, not to his present Excellency; a note which he had just delivered, but which appeared to cause much surprise and displeasure to the Signor Boyd, who was leaving the Chancellerie and following him to the apartment.

In a minute or two more Lorimer Boyd entered.

‘You know something of this. You have a note from him. What does it all mean?’ groaned Sir Douglas. ‘You—is it possible you have known he was going? advised him to go? Where is his note? What does he say? My God, what has driven him to this?’

‘My dear Douglas, pray be calm; this graceless creature does things in a way no one but himself could dream of. I admit counselling him to continue his travels—he is now sufficiently recovered—’

‘Oh no—good heavens, no—he was as weak as water yesterday. Oh, Lorimer, who could have thought—’

‘He is enduring no fatigue; he is at sea, in an excellent steamer, with a surgeon on board. How could I guess he would depart so, without a word of farewell? I did not expect it this week. I have only this moment received his note.’

‘What does he say? read me the poor boy’s note. O God! this is a bitter way of parting!’

‘His note, Douglas—his note—is of a piece with all the rest of

his conduct to you; forgive me if I say his utterly selfish and ungrateful conduct. Here it is: but be assured whatever your anxious mind may fancy about him, he is not only well enough to start, but a thousand times more likely to recover health and equanimity away from these scenes, than by remaining here fretting you and himself, and falling back, as soon as recovered, into scenes of Neapolitan dissipation and extravagance.'

'His note—give me his note.'

Lorimer Boyd handed it to his friend with a sigh of mingled impatience and compassion, and Sir Douglas read it.

'MY DEAR BOYD,—I don't find I have much nerve or heart for any more farewelling,—so this is to tell you I am off! Tell my uncle so. Say all that is proper from me to him; and that I am much obliged for all his care and attention during my illness, &c. The fewer words the better. I can't tell him or you my plans, because I have not yet made any; but I have taken Giuseppe with me, who speaks Greek, and is a much more spirited and likely sort of fellow than the d——d yawning valet I got saddled with when I first arrived in Naples. He has been to Alexandria, too, and up the Nile, and to Spain, and America, and some place in every point of the compass, if one is to believe him, which I am quite willing to do. You will all hear of me sooner or later. In the meanwhile I am better away. "Gone on the grand tour," like the young gentlemen in old-fashioned novels. You may quote, perhaps, your favourite *larmoyant* Petrarch:—

"Lo star mi strugge,—e'l fuggir non m'aita," &c. &c.*

But I have been uncomfortable enough lately, to think any change a change for the better! Old Sir Douglas was all for my travelling, when I was for remaining in England or Scotland; and now I'm all for beginning a vagabond life, and spending a year or two in seeing the world. Who knows but I may be the better for it; and come back as sage as Solon, and infinitely better company? Let us hope so.

'Yours very truly,

'KENNETH ROSS.'

• 'P.S.—Louis, the valet, is paid, and overpaid; so don't let him come down upon Sir Douglas with any pretended claims; except for a character, for which I have told him he may refer to you.

'His accounts were a farce; but he is not a greater rogue than

* 'Staying is anguish,—going, no relief.'

all his *semblables*. One does not expect principle in any of them ; only to be knowing in their calling, get one rapidly through the bore of dressing, and be punctual in taking and delivering notes ; and I must say I had no reason to complain of this fellow, in any of these particulars. You may say that I recommend him.

‘K. R.’

Sir Douglas dropped the hand which held the note, and sighed bitterly.

‘Without a farewell!’ he said. ‘Without one word of farewell!’

‘Oh, be reasonable, Douglas! Was he not always the same from boyhood? Was he ever considerate or grateful? Come away from this place. Come’ (and the words seemed spoken with hesitation) ‘to the Villa Mandórlo with me. Come!’

‘Not now—not now. I must go home first. I am willing to think you acted for the best,—but my heart aches to think of my poor wayward lad: ill and gone. Ill! He may have thought I wished him gone. His note is so odd!’ And again the dejected eyes ran through the cold and careless lines, as if seeking for something they could not find there.

‘I should be sorry if he thought *I* had desired his absence?’ And Sir Douglas looked up in a questioning manner into Lorimer’s face.

Gloomy displeasure was struggling with tenderer feeling on Lorimer’s brow. A tinge of scorn was in his voice and manner, as he answered,—

‘I fear his thinking you desired his absence would only have made him more willing to remain. Douglas, you are a self-tormentor! you were so even as a boy. I will stake my experience of men and things against yours, that in those days your father and brother never suffered one tithe of what *you* suffered, attributing to them feelings, and motives, and vexations, and mortifications, which never occurred to them, though they occurred to you, and though most certainly they would have haunted you had you stood in their place. For Heaven’s sake, try and put aside your own view of this day’s mischance! Kenneth ought not to have done what he has done; he should have gone this day week, after preparing you—after asking your guidance and advice—after bidding you a kindly and grateful farewell. What then? It is not in him! And the very want of natural tenderness that prevented his seeing that this was the proper course for him to pursue,

prevents him at this moment from suffering. I would wager any money that he is at this moment—while you are grieving here—lying on the deck in the sunshine, smoking a cigar ; recovering from the very slight degree of fatigue that active and capable fellow Giuseppe would have permitted him to endure ; enjoying the morning breeze at sea,—and thinking far more of how the change will answer to *him*, than of any of the effects the suddenness of his departure may have upon us. I will call an hour hence at your hotel, and we will walk to Santa Lucia together ; or will you come to the Chancellerie ?’

‘ No ; I will wait for you at the hotel. I had rather be alone for a little. Alone—even from you, Lorimer.’

As he spoke he held out his hand, and the two friends parted. Lorimer Boyd looked sadly, and somewhat sternly, after the tenderer, less resolute man ; and Sir Douglas looking sorrowfully out over the sea, in the direction where the smoke of the vanished steamer had been visible in the earlier morning, repeated to himself in a choked voice,—

‘ Without a word of farewell or explanation !’

The little brown fisher-boy was still playing on the sands. Nanella was still sitting, her head drooping, disconsolate and silent, by the side of the older woman, who was spinning from a distaff, from habit, mechanically, and with hard-set lines of grieving round her mouth, but without any outward show of emotion.

How little, when he pitied the girl and laughed with the boy that morning, had Sir Douglas imagined their sorrow would be linked with his sorrow, and that the departure of Giuseppe would seem also to him an event disturbing all the tranquillity of that day, and many a day to come, till news could arrive of the wanderer !

CHAPTER XVI.

ALCYONE.

LORIMER BOYD had time before he rejoined Sir Douglas to inform the inhabitants of the Villa Mandórlo of the very sudden departure of Kenneth. The maps which he and Gertrude had been looking at, the night before, with a view to sketching out some plan of travel for him,—and allowing him to propose it to his uncle him-

self,—still lay on the table, with marks of the different routes by land and sea, which Lorimer had thought likeliest to interest him. Gertrude felt quite guilty as she looked at them; as if she had planned not only his departure, but the manner of it. Lady Charlotte saw the matter in the serenest light of unmitigated rejoicing.

‘Dear me! Well, I never expected Mr. Kenneth would have given so little trouble. I thought he would have come here like Beauty and the Beast,—I mean like the beast that was a prince in reality, you know, in that story; for, of course, we must all allow Mr. Ross himself to be a beauty: I thought he would come moaning and complaining to Gertrude (he certainly was moaning and complaining the day you and he were talking so loud together, my dear); and then afterwards being ill, or pretending to be very ill; which is exactly what the Beast-Prince did, if you recollect. Gertrude! Indeed, *he* pretended to be dying, in a corner of the garden,—to excite pity, you know. Men are so fond of exciting pity; and they are so very obstinate when one can’t like them; wonderfully obstinate they are! I remember a Sir John Evans, who was in love with my sister; such a red-faced, loud, bull-voiced sort of a man, and *he* wouldn’t give up, though mamma and I told him over and over again it was of no use proposing; and he kept saying in such a voice,—a voice like a trombone at the play,—“I will make you so happy, my dear!”—and my sister answered so sensibly; “I don’t want to be happy, if you are to make me so, Sir John; I wish to be happy my own way;” and then like the Beast-Prince (and like Kenneth Ross), he said he was ill, and was quite broken-hearted; as if a man *could* be broken-hearted who had such a voice, and went about in a dress that looked like an old jockey’s! And when he heard she was going to marry somebody else, he swore the most horrid oaths,—and then in about a month he came to mamma and told her he also was going to marry somebody else: and in his big voice he said something about “hitting the right nail on the head at last,” and not “wearing the willow;” and that he had made the girl’s acquaintance at a meet of the hounds on a Thursday, and proposed for her on the Saturday, because it never did to crane when you were going to take a leap!

‘Now what good would it have been to pity *him*? None at all; and you see he didn’t really require it: and I don’t pity Kenneth. Surely *you* ain’t going to pity Kenneth?’ added she, with a sudden break in her long monologue, seeing her daughter’s abstracted eyes,

which were fixed on the atlas on the table, gradually filling with tears.

‘No mamma,’ said Gertrude, smiling through the glittering drops, and wiping them away,—‘I was not pitying Mr. Kenneth Ross, but thinking of his uncle. I know this suddenness will vex him; will cut him to the heart.’

‘Well, now, really Gertie,’ interposed Lady Charlotte, with more warmth than usual, ‘you will spoil Sir Douglas. You should never spoil men, and you should never pity them; because they don’t care half so much about you. I assure you they don’t.’ And she gave a meditative twirl to the long ringlet; slightly nibbled the end of it, and continued very gravely,—‘And I would be particularly cautious about spoiling Sir Douglas, if I were you, because it will make him think himself so very superior,—in fact he *is* very superior; but then, you know, he must be very foolish in some little corner of his brain, if he is sorry that Kenneth is gone; when we are all so very glad, and he ought to be glad too. I am sure, as for me, I could dance for joy! I could, indeed; only, of course, Sir Douglas would be shocked; and I don’t wish to shock him. Now here he comes, Gertrude; and I do hope you won’t be so silly as to seem sorry; because there really is nothing to be sorry about.’

But Gertrude comprehended better than her garrulous parent, that in spite of the relief of Kenneth’s much-desired absence, there *was* something to be sorry about; and she received Sir Douglas with a degree of sympathetic tenderness which perhaps was the only true balm his wounded heart was at that time capable of receiving.

Then followed days of such peace and close communion that the hearts of both must have been cast in strangely different mould from other human beings, if happiness had not predominated in them. And though Gertrude, in the first hours of that anxiety so hard to bear, which had visited Sir Douglas, shared with him the pang and soothed its bitterness,—the natural gladness consequent on relief from constraint, embarrassment, and a certain degree of terror with which Kenneth’s wild threats had possessed her, shone out in a little while like sunshine after a storm.

Her gladness was new witchery in Sir Douglas’s eyes. He had seen her tender, passionate, indignant, comforting; but he had never seen her playful—never in the pretty mood of ‘girlish spirits;’ and, like all men who have led busy lives among grave interests, it was a welcome and a pleasant thing to him: one charm the more where all was already so charming. He was surprised at his own cheerfulness, but even the ever-recurring anxiety about Kenneth

could not make him otherwise than cheerful. And the step that Gertrude listened for every day with increasing fervour of welcome, every day came glad and alert to the door of that villa whose architect he could have found it in his heart to bless, even in the words of little brown Pepe's nasal song.

At length they had news of the wanderer. In the midst of their preparations for leaving Naples, a letter arrived, not from Kenneth—whether too angry, or too lazy, or too careless to write—but from the hero of Nanella's heart, the coral-diver, Giuseppe. And in truth not even by him, for whatever other perfections culminated in that much-lamented lover, he could not write his own love-letters, or indeed write at all, beyond a very curious and elaborate attempt at signing his name.

Few Italians in the lower classes, and few indeed in the middle classes, think it at all incumbent on them to write their own letters. Their most secret thoughts, their most affectionate avowals, their most important business—all these topics for correspondence are given over to the *Scrivano*, or public letter-writer, who may be seen often plying his vocation at the corner of the public street.

Diversity of style need not be looked for. The compositions resemble each other nearly as closely as the pattern epistles which are to be found in those old-fashioned guides to epistolary excellence, the *Complete Letter-writers*. In which works may be found gravely set down for copying such a list as the following:—

To a young lady, demanding her hand in marriage.

To the same, after her acceptance of your suit.

Ditto, after rejecting it.

Ditto to bid her farewell.

To an amorous gentleman, repulsing his advances.

To the same, according him a meeting.

To a merchant trafficking in foreign wares and china.

To a lady who has lost her husband in the wars.

And so on, *ad infinitum*.

But at least these published models of how you ought to express your secret sentiments, admit of private selection. Not so the aid invoked from the *Scrivano*; you must inform him *viva voce* of your dearest thoughts, and desire him passionately to implore a return of your love, while he tranquilly listens and takes a pinch of snuff. You must do this too, very often, not only in the hearing of the *Scrivano* (whom, of course, you intend shall hear you), but in the hearing of some *dolce far niente* bystander, who pauses to amuse his mind through his ear without reference to your pleasure; or

some other would-be correspondent, who waits discontentedly to say what *he* has to say till you have finished what *you* have to say,—wondering at your passion and your prosiness,—longing to spur you into a more rapid wind-up of your love or your anger, and pouring into the ear of the unmoved Scriváno some totally different subject of thought, before the latter has done sprinkling sand over the moist inky messages of affection you have just paid him to despatch.

Some snuffy old poulterer, anxious to know the market-price of quails and redlegged partridges by the dozen, nudges away perhaps a young girl whose eyes are full of tears and whose heart is full of sorrow; and in his turn is nudged away by some stalwart youth like Giuseppe; who, cheerily looking out during the time of his brief dictation pays with a gay smile for what the Scriváno may think a proper proportion of the language of love and despair; in a letter in which there is often as little real sadness as there is in the nightingale's song, but to which the living 'Complete Letter-writer' gives that conventional turn, without which neither the sender nor the recipient would be contented.

Nor are they contented very easily, to judge by the high-flown phrases which adorn some of these epistles; seeming to prove that the more exaggerated the hyperbole, the better in their opinion is the style.

A young fisherman in Giuseppe's situation, advances and desires the Scriváno at Messina immediately to inform Miss Nanella at Naples that he is, he thanks Heaven, in good health, and hopes she is the same. That his master is in improved health; rich, and liberal. He is sorry to have left her at such short notice; but it was a good chance, and it would have been madness to lose it. He will marry her on his return. At present they travel in foreign lands—to Tunis or to Greece—he knows not where. She is to be cheerful, and embrace his mother, who is in return also to embrace her,—and he remains 'her own Giuseppe.'

From this small egg, the Scriváno will produce the astonishing 'Pharaoh's Serpent' of an epistle such as the aforesaid Nanella confided to Sir Douglas, with tears of joy and thankfulness and many clasplings and unclasplings of her little brown hands, and glad clappings of the same; and on the return of the precious missive, dropped it into her bodice; gave it a final pressure of affection there; and ran lightly away, all smiles, to read it once more (for the twentieth time) with the equally exultant weather-beaten old mother.

Giuseppe's terse and abridged sentiments were thus rendered by the accomplished and fluent Scriváno:—

‘My ever beloved, regretted, and every-moment-of-the-day-and-night-sighed-for, Nanella !

‘Tears,—hot and constantly dropping,—almost effaced for me, after we separated, the heavenly shores of Naples. My heart appeared as if about to burst in two ; leaving you the one half, and the other, only, going with your miserable Giuseppe ! Scarcely could I believe it was day, so dark did all things seem around me : but the fortune of poverty is to be torn from what it loves, because it is a necessity with the poor to earn ! The riches of the English Signor are immense ; and so also is his liberality ; and for that reason only, I adopted with anguish the step of going on board the departing steamer.

‘Do not suppose, my Nanella, that my love can be at all shaken by the great storms which the saints and the Madonna thus permit to try the ever-faithful and at-this-hour-almost-completely-drowned-in-sorrow heart of your Giuseppe ! At my return we will kneel together before the excellent priest, and obtain for our by-me-so-much-longed-for union, the everlasting consent of an approving and overlooking Heaven !

‘The youthful Signor who was ill at Naples is reinvigorated by the much-bestarred clear nights and breeze-adorned-and-refreshed days he has lately passed. His Excellency’s plans of travel are still unsettled. One day he will speak of sailing for Tunis, another day he will hold that it will greatly divert his mind to seek the shores of the country of Greece. Faithful to the duties imposed on me when the Signor Inglese entered into a convention that I should accompany him, I shall,—before the all-seeing eye of a just Providence, and under the approbation of the saint whose name I bear,—together with the assistance of the angels of succour,—continue to travel wherever the Signor is pleased to appoint.

‘Adieu, my Nanella, Nanellina, adieu ! Embrace for me my beloved, worthy, and ever-respected mother, to whom shall be my next letter. Let her also embrace you for me. As many as there are stars out on a great night in summer, so many kisses I deposit on your much-desired cheek ! Keep me in your heart and mind, and give to all asking friends the assurance of my entire health and contentment. Strive also to merit the blessing of Heaven by a cheerful spirit. It will seem to me a thousand years till I see you again, and embrace you in very truth !

‘Your GIUSEPPE.’

CHAPER XVII.

THE CROWNING JOY.

MORE letters (in the same florid style) from the absent Giuseppe, and one or two briefer missives from Kenneth—both to his uncle and to Lorimer Boyd—sufficed to set their minds at rest, at all events as to the health and present well-doing of the wayward object of so much anxiety. He was tolerably thankful for a general settlement of his difficulties, which, without greatly trenching on his future; and with some renewed sacrifice on the part of his uncle, the latter had effected. He was amused and ‘improved,’ as he assured them, by his scheme of travel; and the period of his eventful return was left in the vaguest uncertainty,—to Lady Charlotte’s intense satisfaction.

Once only he alluded to Gertrude, and then not in the honest earnest manner which Sir Douglas would have given worlds to read; but with a flippant affectation of carelessness that wounded more than if her name had never been mentioned.

‘Remember me,’ he said, ‘to the Skiftons. Lay me at the feet of my aunt that is to be. If I find in my travels some “pearl of price,” I shall garner it up as a wedding gift. Meanwhile my best wishes are hers, for her future health and prosperity. If you let me know the day of the happy event, I will

“tak’ a stoup o’ kindness yet,”

and drink everybody’s good health. I am always glad, as you know, of an opportunity of health-drinking; and believe it to be much more conducive to my own health, than water-drinking Mr. Boyd or temperate Uncle Douglas choose to admit.’

Sir Douglas sighed as he read the careless lines; but his sighs were checked by the spirit of contentment which pervaded his days. ‘Full measure, pressed down, and running over,’ seemed the sum of his happiness. The more he saw of Gertrude the more he loved her: the more he rejoiced in the blessed good fortune that had made her return his love; the more he blest the sweet eyes that were to shine over his future, and light the lovely but lonely walks and halls of Glenrossie Castle.

Their parting was near. Their first parting since they had agreed to be united for ever; their last parting till the time when

that union should be made sure, by the solemn ceremony that was to pronounce them one 'till death do us part.'

Death—only death!

Sir Douglas was to go to Scotland—to Glenrossie; to give directions, and settle much that needed arrangement previous to bringing there the new lady of the castle. And Lady Charlotte was to go to London, to see many old friends (and some new ones), who rather grudged her the success of her chaperonage during her somewhat forlorn widowhood.

For they had heard that Gertrude Skifton—'who, after all, was no such great beauty'—had captivated one of the richest of the Scotch baronets, though she had failed with the Prince Colonna; and they thought 'the poor, silly creature,' who had married the nameless Skifton, had had a success somewhat beyond her deserts.

Several young ladies of the highest lineage and most unimpeachable beauty had been 'going about in the very best society for several seasons without any such desirable result; and, altogether, the sudden arrival of their old friend,—with a ready-made stock of happiness and wealth for a daughter of 'Mr. Skifton, deceased,' whom they had never made up their mind to patronise,—and who now obviously did not require their patronising,—showed rather in the light of grievance than as a subject of congratulation.

The excessive simplicity, too, of Gertrude did not suit them. The real, natural, unaffected, innocent independence of her manner; anxious for nothing, resenting nothing, did not please them. Some said she was haughty; and some said that she was dowdy; and some that 'she seemed to be as great a fool as her mother.'

The stately handsome mature bridegroom was also the subject of captious remark. Some laughed at the wily widow 'catching' him for her daughter. Some thought that really the girl was not amiss, and might have done better than marry a man twice her age. Some affected to be mightily amused and tickled at the story of Old Sir Douglas going out to Italy to lecture his scapegrace nephew, and being caught in the toils himself, and brought home captive. Some said he had 'behaved abominably to the young man;' persuaded the mother to reject his suit, and then made love to the daughter on his own account.' Some were of opinion that the mother and daughter were two *intrigantes*, who had thrown over the nephew when they found they could entrap the uncle, and 'whedled' a confirmed old bachelor till they brought him to the point of matrimony.

When was there ever any marriage arranged, which bitter

tongues did not slur,—and idle tongues canvass,—and envious tongues find fault with,—and careless tongues discuss? Proving only, in the slurring, canvassing, fault-finding, and discussing, the great mystery of preference; and the impossibility of common-place understandings being brought to feel that such preference is God's inspiration, and not a scheme of man's making,—ruled like a map or an account-book, with the set boundaries of the one, or the apportioned valuing of the other, to regulate the result.

'Why did she love him? Curious fool, be still.
Is human love the growth of human will?'

No—nor of human comprehension. Those who loved would fain escape, it may be, from the thrall. Those who do *not* love would give the world to be able to bend and bow their hearts and imaginations to the choice that would 'answer' in all respects,—the choice that would do them credit,—that would promote their worldly advancement,—that would satisfy friends and prudence, and their own predetermined rules.

It cannot be. LOVE steps in, with a smiling mastery, and waves the magic wand which makes them tremble and obey! Love—the great magician—by the light of whose lamp palaces arise brighter than Aladdin's; at whose bidding voices more melodious than Ariel's, sound his sweet chorus of 'Follow! Follow,' whose luring from common-place things may end in wrecking us; but rapturous are the hours first passed; sailing with the tide, down the rapid river of unreturning time!

Gertrude was sailing down that stream; lit by the warm sunshine joy, and lulled by the music of its rippling waves.

Lady Charlotte was made a little restless and unhappy; both by the ironical jealousies we have alluded to; the great desire she had to collect together all sorts of titled relations and guests; and the extreme reluctance of the bridegroom to be made 'a public spectacle,' as he termed it. A reluctance which Gertrude seemed fully to share—and to yield only from love of her mother, to the desire of the latter for the pomps and ceremonies of the nuptial day.

The day came; and the guests. That agitated and agitating vision of bridal vestments, murmured replies at the altar, blushing bridesmaids, and a veiled bride,—the sobbing kiss, the hurried departure,—the cheers of the mob gathered round the doors, and the blank silence afterwards in spite of crowds and tumultuous chattering, which mark the progress of a 'Wedding Day,'—were all gone through,—as they have been gone through a million

times, and will be gone through a million and a million times more. And before Lady Charlotte's weak, vain, loving heart had recovered from its agitation, 'Sir Douglass and Lady Ross, were off on their way to Glenrossie.'

On their way to Glenrossie! Ah! what other rapture, what other fulness of joy, shall compare to the day, when the woman who loves deeply and truly, is borne to the home of the man she so loves?

For ever! The human 'for-ever'—the for-ever 'till death do us part,' how it stretches out its illimitable future of joy, as we sit, hand linked in hand, sure of each other, of existence, of love, of all that makes a paradise of earth; and the hedges and boundaries that divide lands, flee past before our dreaming eyes; and the morning sun glows into noon; and the noon burns and fades; and the day sinks again, with a crimson haze, into sunset—and perhaps the sweet and quiet light—the pale light of the moon—swims up into that sea of blue, men call the sky; while still we are journeying on to the one spot on earth where we have cast our anchor of hope; to the trees and lawns, and rocks and hills, and gardens of flowers, and paths of delight, which *were* till now all *his*: but since the morning are *ours*!—the place we have loved without ever seeing it, perhaps,—the place that saw his boyhood; where his people drew breath; where his dear ones have lived and died; where *we* hope to live and die—Home! The blessed word—HOME!

So, in the shadows and lights of one of the sweetest nights of English summer, Sir Douglas Ross and Gertrude journeyed on; so, in the clear moonlight of the advanced hours, they drove through the solemn darkened approach, scented with the aromatic odour of the pine trees; and so, the journey ending at last, Sir Douglas turned to his new-made bride,—before the bustle of entrance and welcome, the barking of dogs, the ringing of bells, the flutter and hurry of welcome and reception, should break in on their silent dream of joy,—and passionately kissing her cheek, murmured softly in her ear as he led her in, 'God bless this day to both of us! May you be happy here, my Gertrude, and never regret the day that made you mine for ever!'

For ever!

CHAPTER XVIII.

PARADISE.

GLENROSSIE was Paradise. For many and many a day after Gertrude had crossed the threshold of that stately castle, she firmly believed that no other home so perfect had ever opened upon bridal eyes. The extraordinary beauty of that wild scenery; blue lake, brown mountain, and wild foaming stream ending in abrupt water-falls; the stately growth of the incense-breathing old fir-trees; the ceaseless change of prospect from different mountain paths; the glad welcome of the old tenantry to 'the lady' of their long-absent master; the delicious power of helping; of visiting the poor, and blind, and sick, and bed-ridden, and being able to alter their degrees of suffering, and act as an inferior Providence in favour of those obscure and uncared-for destinies; with the sunshine of love and approval over all she said, did, or planned, from the enamoured Sir Douglas;—left nothing to desire of happiness in Gertrude's heart.

And then, very slowly, very quietly, very unexpectedly, and yet very clearly, she awoke to the perception that in her Paradise there was a snake. Not a great magnificent satanic snake. Not a serpent with a cherub's head, as in the old pictures; coiling round the smooth-stommed trees, glittering and rippling with a river-like movement in its gliding body and varnished skin. Not a python of strange majesty and power, disputing the sense of Heaven's clear revelations, and undermining the authority of its ordinances, by words of seeming wisdom, voluble and sweet as those dim oracles which the priesthood of Apollo sent through metal tubes to make the heathen altars seem divine. Not a creature that awed and yet fascinated; whose presence was a mystery, and its counsel almost a scornful command. But a little sliding, slithering, mean, small snake: a 'snake in the grass': a snake whose tiny bite the heel might almost carelessly spurn when it seemed to pursue, and whose power to wound might be doubted and smiled over, till the miracle of death by its venom were irrevocably proved! A snake that looked like a harmless eft.

Nothing but the instinctive repulsion which exists in certain natures to reptiles even when unseen, their presence being discoverable to the inner soul of feeling though not to the outward sense,

could have inspired Gertrude with the aversion she gradually felt for Sir Douglas's half-sister, Alice Ross.

Alice had not offended the bride; on the contrary, she flattered her; she obviously endeavoured to please, to wind round her, to become necessary to her. She went beyond the mere yielding up gracefully the small delegated authority which for many years she had seemed to exercise, from being 'the only one of the family resident at the Castle.' She was not satisfied with dropping to the condition of friend and equal; she rather assumed that of poor relation and humble companion. She chose toleration, and repudiated welcome. As to the near connexion between herself and Sir Douglas, she always alluded to it in a humble, half-mournful, apologetic manner, as if it were a fault, but not *her* fault; and yet a fault for which she was willing to make amends to the extent of her feeble powers. She behaved towards him as towards one who was to be admired, revered, wondered at; but to *love* him would be taking too great a liberty. Still, in her own subservient way she contrived to impress him with a notion of humble worship; and she lost no opportunity of increasing that impression even while she deprecated all evidences of its ruling spirit in her mind.

The very first evening they were all seated at the oaken table where books, and flowers, and carpet-work lay in crowded companionship: she softly gathered together, with a little trembling sigh a sort of select harvest from among the books; saying, with the slow Highland drawl peculiar to some Scotch voices:—

'I should have moved these before; for I count them as my very own; but they have lain here so long! Of course I know nothing of military matters, even now; but I have made quite a collection of books about armour, and about forces in different countries, and fortifications of various kinds—and histories of battles! I have a pedlar's pack of them; Gustavus of Sweden, with no end of plates; and I have even got,—you will laugh,—I have even got a great big volume called the "Tactics of Elian;" showing all the modes of disposing armies in the Greek and Roman days.'

'The Tactics of Elian! What upon earth are they?' said Gertrude, laughing.

'Well, I cannot explain it better than I have done,—in my simple way,'—drawled Alice. 'The book shows how they led armies into the field, and how they placed their troops. I have been so accustomed to think of a soldier's life in all ways' (and here she looked deprecatingly towards Sir Douglas), 'that no book about it seemed dull to me; and I found very curious things. Such cruel

things! Think of instructions how to take a fort in two several ways; one way if you are obliged to consider the lives of your men (how many of them are killed, in fact); and another way if you "can afford to expend men;" yes, that is the exact expression; I remember it; it shocked me to think of the calculation. A cruel life, but a brave life,'—and again she looked at her half-brother, who was smiling with an amused expression, as she slowly delivered her little oration.

'And have you studied these military grammars, so that you could undertake these tasks?'

'Yes, I think I could take a fort,' she answered, in a grave deliberate unconscious manner.

'And a bridge?'

'Yes—a bridge. And I could construct a pontoon,—and move troops across the marshes.' (Which she pronounced *mairshes*.)

'What a pity you were not born a generation earlier, Alice, and that your abilities were not employed in the disastrous retreat from Walcheren!'

'Well, I just forbode that you would laugh at me,'—she said, with the same placid drawl; 'and so I do not mind; and I'll carry away my books, and put them in the shelves of the Tower-room. I've never changed my room, you know: perhaps I should change it now? If Lady Ross thinks—when she goes over the castle'—and here she made one of her faces of humble deprecating inquiry, and paused.

'Oh! dear no,' said Gertrude, eagerly: and 'Oh! no, no,' broke in Sir Douglas with equal warmth. 'You've lived there all your life; I should be sorry indeed, if now—'

'And I should be sorry,' said Gertrude, with a kindly smile, 'that my coming should have such a disagreeable result. I hope, unless the day should come when you would leave us and the Tower-room, for some *very* pleasant reason, that it will be home as it has always been.'

A glance sharper than at all agreed with the drawling quiet voice, shot from Alice's grey eyes; a glance of doubtful inquiry: and then she demurely replied:—

'It is not very probable, after so many years, that I should have the reason for leaving which you think so pleasant, Lady Ross.'

The bride was young and quick of feeling, and she looked down and blushed very red; for she did not know how to get over her little difficulty. She knew that when she spoke, with her sweet, cordial smile, of some 'very pleasant reason' for leaving, she meant

if Alice went away to be married, and she comprehended that her new sister-in-law had doubted whether she meant this speech in all sincerity : since Alice was certainly what in common parlance is called, even when the party still retains claims to personal attraction, 'an old maid.'

Alice *did* retain claims to personal attraction : her well-shaped head,—though its banded hair was of that disagreeable dry drab colour, which had not yet the advantage of our modern fashion of being dyed of a golden red,—surmounted a long, slender white throat ; and a figure which, if somewhat too spare for artistic notions of beauty, was, as her maid expressed it, 'jimp and genteel.'

She moved (as she spoke) with slow precision ; and not without some degree of grace. The only positively disagreeable thing about her, was a certain watchfulness, which disturbed and fascinated you. Do what you would, Alice's eyes were on you. You felt them fixed on your shoulder : your forehead ; the back of your head ; your hands ; your feet ; the sheet of paper on which you were writing a letter ; the title and outside cover of the book you were reading ; the harmless list you were making out of your day's shopping ; the anxious calculation of your year's income ; and the little vague sketch you scribbled while your mind was occupied about other things.

I have spoken of her as the snake in this Paradise : but there was something essentially *feline*, also, in her whole manner ; and indeed the cat is, among inferior animals, what the snake is among a lower order of creatures. The noiseless, cautious, circuitous mode in which she made her way across a room was cat-like ; the dazed quiet of her eyes on common occasions, had the expression of a cat sitting in the sun ; and the startling illumination of watchful attention in them at other times, recalled to our fancy the same creature catching sight of its prey. Even the low purring, and rubbing of pussy's soft fur against your side, seemed to find its analogy in her slow soft words of flattery : as the gentle approach, which neither required nor even accepted any returning caress, resembled the gliding to and fro on some familiar hearth of that unloving little domestic animal, whose cry is alien and weird to our ears, and its shape like a diminished tiger.

Above all, in her gravity and changelessness, she was cat-like.

The dog (our other household inmate) has his variety of moods, like his master. He is joyous, eager, sulky, angry, restless ; conscious of our love or displeasure ; capable of correction ; able to learn ; has his own preferences too ; welcoming some of the habitual visitors to his master's house, growling at others,—he only knows

why. He loves the children of the house ; he submits to have baby's awkward helpless fat fingers thrust in his eye, without resentment. He romps with the boys, and with his own species ; affecting the fiercest onslaughts, and then mumbling with a mouth like velvet when the mimic war leaves him victor in the play ! He is a creature made up of variety. But a cat is *always the same*. Equally on her guard with friend and foe—stealthily, indifferent, unsympathizing—as willing to gnaw the babe in its cradle as the rat in the barn ; and gliding away to attend to her own private interests let what will be the event of the hour in the household circle of which she forms part. She is a daily mystery, and a nightly annoyance. In the midst of our tame city-life she is *fera natura*. We advertise our dogs as 'Lost, or stolen,' but we say of our cat that she has 'gone away.'

Even in going away she consults her own convenience ; she does not stay, like the dog, because she is ours, and because we are there ; but only so long as she is comfortable.

Alice Ross was comfortable at Glenrossie, and she wished to stay. She saw with curiosity and attention the conscious blush of the young wife, when she had alluded to the chance of her leaving the castle for a 'pleasant reason.' She herself was not the least embarrassed ; she was merely watchful. She was guessing at her new relative's disposition. She finished reaping her little harvest of books, and said her maid would fetch them.

'And when they are sorted, Lady Ross, and all on the shelves, you'll maybe look in to my lonely den, in the Tower-room, and have a gay good laugh at the fittings there ; for the walls will match the books for soldiering. There are prints of most of the notable heroes of modern wars ; and there's one, the best of all, that I spent a golden piece or two getting framed, and I'll leave you to guess who *that* will be.'

And the upward glance and grave smile were again directed to her tall half-brother, who had risen from his seat and was turning over the leaves of one of the 'military grammars' with some interest. He was rather touched too at the mention of the 'lonely den,' and he gave a little friendly tap to the pale cheek of his half-sister, saying gaily, 'Well, this hero will come and see your other heroes to-morrow ; and so will Gertrude.'

The little tap on the cheek was more or less pleasant to Alice ; but it woke no dimpling smile nor tender answering look.

'I would like very much to show them all to Lady Ross,' she said, quietly.

For one wavering moment Gertrude seemed about to speak. She, too, was touched at the solitary picture of life in the 'lonely den;' she thought of saying something kind to her new sister-in-law.

'Call me Gertrude; do not call me "Lady Ross,"' was the sentence that rose to her young lips. But there was a brief space of chill silence, no one could say why; and the words remained unspoken.

CHAPTER XIX.

ALICE ROSS.

ALICE was the first to break that silence. 'And how did you leave Kenneth?' she said; 'and when will he be coming to Torrieburn? His feckless mother's been in great distress about him, by what I hear.'

'Kenneth's better,' shortly answered Sir Douglas, as he bent again over a book of military plans; and his handsome brow visibly clouded over.

The illuminated pussy-cat eyes had diamonds in them for a second or two, as Alice listened. She looked first at Sir Douglas and then at Gertrude, who had followed up her husband's assurance with the words,—

'Oh! yes, better; so much better; quite well; only not strong yet.'

The words were nothing; only the manner, the hurried and embarrassed manner; and the blush, another blush deeper than the one which had betrayed her consciousness that Alice doubted over 'the pleasant reason' speech.

- What had happened?

Had Kenneth done something extremely wrong and disgraceful? something the whole family were to be ashamed of, and shamed by, as soon as it was known?

Alice thought that quite possible. She knew a great deal of hard gossip about her young nephew, though she had steadily refused to have anything to do with his mother, or to visit her, or admit her to the 'lonely den.'

That tabooed female might call herself 'Mrs. Ross Heaton of Torrieburn.'—or by any other name she pleased,—now she was

again married 'more decently;' but to Miss Alice Ross she remained, and was destined to remain for ever, 'Maggie of the Mill.'

Certainly her son Kenneth was very likely to have done something disgraceful.

Or had he merely done something so outrageously extravagant that his uncle had quarrelled with him? Involved himself past retrieval? ruined himself, in fact, at the very outset of his career?

Alice resolved to go the very next day and make a visit far over the hills, and 'ayont the Falls,' to that Dowager Countess of Clochnaben, who in the opening pages of this history was already a Dowager Countess, though a young widow; and mother to the sickly Earl of Clochnaben and to Lorimer Boyd.

The sickly Earl was still sickly, and still alive; and to say truth, Alice Ross had wasted many a year in endeavouring so to compass her ends that she might become head nurse in that establishment, by marrying the invalid. But the Dowager-widow was too wary for such a plan to succeed; and without absolutely 'cutting' Miss Ross at any period of their long acquaintance, she so plainly held her aloof when her intentions became visible, and so continuously frustrated the cleverest little plots, that Alice became weary of the struggle, and patient perforce.

The Dowager was now an elderly female; the Earl not a bit nearer death apparently than in his weakly adolescence; and the two women continued friends; though the elder had well-founded suspicions that the younger cherished an idea of succeeding by inheritance, as it were, to the coveted post; and of so ingratiating herself with Lord Clochnaben, that he would *need* her when his mother came to die—and needing her, would marry her *then*.

If it had ever occurred to the Earl of Clochnaben that he would be made more comfortable by having a wife, and that wife Miss Ross, he certainly would have proposed; for he thought of nothing but his own comfort. But it did *not* occur to him. He did not want to be beloved; he wanted to be attended to, and he had already all the attention he could desire. He did not want to be amused; he was not amusable. He wanted his three draughts a-day poured out for him, and his pills brought to him at night. All which had been done, and continued to be done, by his mother's maid, from his boyhood to the present hour.

And so the years rolled on! 'While there is life there is hope,'—and Alice was of a persevering nature. She paid her patient visits to the dull old house and its inmates, and sat at home on days when the Dowager had intimated that 'if it was fine' she would drive to

Glenrossie. She walked by the side of Lord Clochnaben's garden-chair. She played cards with him on week-days: and heard texts expounded, with long wandering 'discourses' and longer wandering prayers from Lady Clochnaben's favourite 'meenister,' on Sundays. It was a curiously dull life, but it suited Alice. Her mother's few friends had formerly sent for her occasionally, for gaieties in Edinburgh; Perth hunts; and county balls; and she had partaken of these moderate pleasures in her own tranquil and reserved manner; neither feeling nor expressing any particular gratitude to those who had invited her; never showing the least glimmer of desire to stay a day beyond the time first appointed; nor knitting intimacies, and promising that eager correspondence which girls so frequently indulge in, with any of her own sex and age, whom she might fall in with on these occasions.

People got rather tired of inviting Alice Ross; and the summonses to assist at gnieties became few and far between. She was not one of your 'useful' young ladies. She never played quadrilles or waltzes for a stand-up impromptu dance, in a gay party of bright juniors; gracefully shelving herself, as an elderly and faded virgin. She knitted no warm slippers for gouty old gentlemen or chilly dowagers. Her care was confined to keeping her own little toes warm. She never 'sat back' in any body's carriage in her life. She always 'declined to drive' on such occasions—lamenting, with a grave smile, that she was not 'as robust as some folk,' to whom it was indifferent which side they occupied in a barouche. She never pronounced the agreeable sentence, 'Oh! but let *me* fetch it; I am just going upstairs,'—to some lady oblivious of her work-box or carpet canvas. Of the three conjugations, active, passive, or neuter, she understood only the two latter.

In the apparent decline of the little popularity she had once enjoyed, she showed neither resentment nor regret. It seemed all one to her whether she were invited or left out; whether her mother's old friends died off, or forgot her, or, from any overwhelming grief, were unable to send for her as formerly to form part of their home circle. She had a most discouraging way of receiving news of such persons; replying to her interlocutors by the two monosyllables of 'Yes' and 'Oh.' The 'Yes' being slightly interrogative, and the 'Oh,' a calm assent, not an exclamation. As thus:

'You have heard, dear Miss Ross, of your cousin Dalrymple's misfortune?'

'No.'

‘Well, he was persuaded to enter in that speculation of Indian railways lately planned, so Lady Miller told me.’

‘Yes?’

‘And he is completely ruined! His eldest girl is going out as a governess.’

‘Oh.’

‘Lady Miller told me, too, the horrid story of the death of Mrs. Frazer’s two little girls by burning; long ago, you know; when Clochnaben was a boy.’

‘Yes?’

‘There was a Christmas party in the house, and the nurses went down to see the company, leaving the candle near the little beds, and the curtains caught fire in the draught of the door, which had been left ajar; and the poor children’s cries weren’t heard because of the music downstairs, and when they found they were quite dead—suffocated!’

‘Oh.’

Let it not be supposed, however, from this undemonstrative style of conversation, that Alice Ross was in very truth indifferent to the course of events. In all that touched *herself*, she was keen, far-sighted, and long-remembering. She never forgot an injury. She never omitted an opportunity.

Her cat-like resemblance extended to the order and method of her every-day life. In the open daylight of social intercourse, she was tranquil and unobtrusive, or purring and courteous; but in the darkness of solitary hours—in the ‘lone den’—her mind prowled and capered, and took its light leaps in pursuit of prey. There, the dazed eyes resumed their brilliant watchfulness; and gleamed over the gloom of her destiny. There, the many calculations for small and great ends were methodically arranged, and plans laid for besieging, undermining, and beleaguering, such as find no place in military books. The tactics of Elhan were nothing in comparison with the tactics of Alice.

Not that she was always successful. There is such a thing as being *too* cautious, *too* calculating; in common parlance, ‘too clever by half.’

Those who have settled and secret motives for all they say and do, are apt to ascribe the same amount of motive to others; and to found their strategy upon a state of things which does not exist. Sometimes, therefore, she over-reached herself, and was *déroutée* by the very simplicity of those with whom she had to deal. The ground she had to march over at such times afforded no cover for sharp-shooting or ambuscade.

Still she studied unremittingly ; and endeavoured to master the peculiarities and varieties of characters very different from her own. Her half-brother had been one of her earliest studies. Almost as soon as she could think at all, she thought about him. That shy, impressionable, passionate, generous nature seemed revealed to her understanding, though in matters of feeling they had no link in common. She had a great opinion of his power to charm, though she scarcely knew why. For a great number of years she continually expected him to marry ; then came a phase of time when she entirely rid her mind of any such disagreeable expectation ; and then, as life faded away, and the 'pleasant reason' for leaving her own 'lonely den' did not occur, she grew to hope such an event was out of the question ! She had 'kept house' for Sir Douglas during his intervals of home residence. Now, all that was over. There sat the sunny-haired, dove-eyed contrast to herself, enthroned and idolised.

Alice did not like it.

CHAPTER XX.

LADY CLOCHNABEN.

THE morning after her display of military books she rose early, and putting on her short, well-fitting riding-habit, she rode her Highland pony across the hills to Clochnaben.

As it was no part of Alice's tactics to be frank, she did not begin with the real purpose of her visit, namely to discover anything Lorimer Boyd might have written about Kenneth ; but affected to have made her early expedition in order to inform dear Lady Clochnaben that the bride had now arrived and settled at Glenrossie.

She drawled forth this news, and the impression made upon her by the bride, slowly and quietly, without apparent eagerness or interest. The Countess of Clochnaben was standing with her hands behind her, superintending the planting of some trees, when Alice alighted from her pony.

She was so tall, and stood so firmly, that you might think she herself had been planted in the ground ; and so thoroughly well planted, that no storm would avail to uproot her. She had been in youth what is termed 'a fine woman,'—very stately ; but the worst

of immeasurably stately women is, that in old age they are apt to become gaunt. The Countess of Clochnaben *had* become gaunt. She was also very severe in her opinion of others; gaunt in mind as well as body. She kept very early hours. The iron vibration of the rusty old clock in the court-yard, very seldom had the advantage of her in getting the hours of six in summer and seven in winter struck fairly through, before her stern tread was heard on the outer staircase. These morning hours being often chill, and the gusty mountain-gaps full of what Shakespeare calls 'an eager and a nipping air,' she habitually wore over her cap, as a shield against rheumatic headache, a small quilted black silk bonnet; and when she headed her breakfast-table, what with this peculiarity of costume, the rigid and erect carriage of her tall body, and the prepared severity of her mouth, she looked like a venerable judge about to pass sentence on a criminal.

And, indeed, she was continually passing sentence on criminals. Most of her neighbours and connexions were criminals in her eyes; and she spent her time in reviewing their conduct with much asperity.

The late Lord Justice Clerk of Scotland told a friend that, with respect to *females* brought before him for crime, he was 'generally inclined to believe in their guilt.' Whether he held the strict opinion of the Roman Cæsar, that it was a fault in a woman even to be accused or suspected, he did not explain. Neither did Lady Clochnaben explain the grounds of her decisions; but it is certain that she generally concluded females (and most males) whom she summoned for judgment into the Court Session held in her own mind to be 'guilty.'

She was wont to say, grimly, in speaking of any plan proposed to her by persons she thought incompetent,—'I give it my determined opposition.' And it was on these occasions that her factor—nominally (very nominally) 'factor to the Earl of Clochnaben'—used to observe, that she was 'an awfu' woman to contravene.' She herself bore out the factor's assertion. She never made use of that common phrase, 'That is my opinion.' She heard the opinion of others; mowed it down with an absolute reversal; and after setting her thin lips, with a sort of preface of negation, said in a hard distinct voice, 'That's my *dictum*.' All her opinions were '*dictums*,' and all her '*dictums*' were laws.

She was, as I have already observed, very severe on her neighbours. She said she had an 'abhorrence' of sin, and no doubt she had; and she pronounced two '*dictums*' or *dicta*, that greatly

troubled Kenneth's tutor step-father, who was inclined to be liberal in such matters. The first of these was, 'Don't talk to me of temptation; temptations are just simply the sauce the devil serves up fools with.' And the second, 'God's mercy is a great encouragement to obstinate offenders.'

Indeed, offenders of all kinds, obstinate or repentant, found no favour in her eyes. Heaven might pardon them, but Lady Clochnaben could not.

She had a sort of gleam of indulgence for the invalided Clochnaben. He was not 'a sinner,' but 'a poor creature.' She was not exactly fond of him; because (as the same shrewd factor who considered her 'an awfu' woman to contravene' observed) there were two words which were not to be found in her leddyship's vocabulary; '*fond*,' and '*give*.' She was both fierce and parsimonious. But what little milk of human kindness there was in her rugged nature, and what narrow notions of sacrifice, either of her own time or personal comfort, existed there,—existed for the behoof and benefit of Clochnaben.

Once, indeed, she had been betrayed into a burst of something almost like maternal tenderness.

When Mrs. Fraser's two little girls were burnt, Clochnaben (a very timid helpless lad) had fled from the scene; and, for a brief space, it was thought he, too, might have perished. He was found, however, crouched in the garden, and brought back to the house. When his mother beheld him safe and unsinged, in the gladness of her surprise she caught him to her breast with a hearty embrace. But immediately afterwards, recollecting the needless terror and anxiety she had endured on his account, she thrust him from her with one vigorous hand, just far enough to administer with the other a remarkably well-directed pugilistic blow in the pit of the stomach, exclaiming, 'That will teach you not to trifle with my feelings another time.'

She did not permit any of her feelings to be trifled with. She had watched Alice Ross's attempt to marry him with more displeasure than fear. She did not choose that he should marry. She gave all such schemes 'her determined opposition.' She always looked beyond the frail life of her eldest son, to Lorimer Boyd. Lorimer was to marry. Clochnaben was to die single. She looked upon him as a sort of *locum tenens* and temporary representative of the family; the future fortunes of which were to be in the hands of his brother, after he should be quietly reposing in the family vault. She was extremely proud of Lorimer. She had the poems which

he published as a young collegian, bound in scarlet morocco and laid conspicuously on the table in the great sitting-room,—a room hung round with the hard portraits of his ancestors; and she boasted a good deal of his abilities to her few intimate friends.

She had often boasted of her son Lorimer to Alice Ross; and now, when that astute little personage in the grey riding-habit had made her announcement of the arrival of young Lady Ross, an impatient sigh and a ‘glowering’ look told at once that neither the bride nor the subject were particularly welcome.

In truth, if Lady Clochnaben could have given this marriage her ‘determined opposition,’ she would have done so with quite as much vigour as the reader of the tactics of Elian. Her woman’s instinct told her, hard woman though she was, that Lorimer Boyd had taken an interest in Gertrude Skifton beyond what he chose to admit. It was not for nothing, she thought, that after mentioning the Skiftons in every letter he wrote,—quoting them, praising them, delighting in them,—he suddenly ‘kept silence even from good words;’ and, after once or twice mentioning in a gloomy and constrained way the parties they were making with Sir Douglas and Kenneth at Naples, ceased altogether to comment on their existence.

Lady Clochnaben was of opinion that Lorimer ‘had thought of the girl for himself.’ And though she probably would have considered such a match,—in spite of Gertrude’s fortune and good connexion on her mother’s side,—not nearly good enough for the condescension of her consent,—still she resented the chance being taken out of her power, and her favourite son being, as she shrewdly suspected, wounded and disappointed.

They were cousins, too, by a sort of distant Scotch cousinhood; the Clochnabens and Lady Charlotte Skifton; and, though they repudiated all knowledge of the Skifton element in the family, they considered Lady Charlotte to be bound to them by that inextricable tie.

Lady Clochnaben had no motive for reserve, and she abused the young Lady Ross in round set terms: though she did not know her. She sneered a good deal at Sir Douglas. She hoped the marriage *might* turn out well, but that sort of marriage very seldom succeeded. She condescended to say she would come over ‘to the castle,’ ‘though the bride little deserved such attention,’ and that Clochnaben would come also: that was enough.

Then she entered on a branch of the subject most eagerly listened to by Alice: the gossip that had percolated through various channels respecting Kenneth’s admiration for Gertrude, and how his uncle

had cut him out, and what a worthless sinner Kenneth was. And old Lady Clochnaben gave a jocose little shake to the black quilted bonnet, with a grotesque attempt at gaiety; for she thought it a good joke that Kenneth should be ousted and outwitted, though she thought it no joke at all that her son Lorimer should lose *his* chance of winning the same prize.

And all being said that could be said, in croaking dispraise of the new-married couple, the black-capped judge proceeded to the trial of another cause. With which indeed Sir Douglas was also more or less connected: the said cause being the conduct of the Episcopalian clergyman on the estate of Glenrossie, who was actually endeavouring, 'most improperly'—as the irate dowager expressed it,—to get a disused burying-ground consecrated for burials in his own parish!

Now the small Episcopal Church and its interests had been confided by Sir Douglas to Savile Heaton, the tutor who had married Maggie, on that gentleman's own petition; and it was hardly possible to imagine a greater complication than the state of matters induced by this arrangement. Scanty as the population was, there was a Free Kirk, a Scotch Established Church, and the somewhat decorated little temple of worship over which Mr. Savile Heaton presided, the Episcopalian Church,—on which he spent the very slender funds he could command of his own; in which he preached rather elaborate sermons; and for which he had trained a little band of singers, accompanied by a small organ.

The amount of fierce quarrelling among the differing Christians of these three churches; the frenzy of scorn; the sly backbiting; the consigning of each other's souls to eternal and unavoidable perdition; the losing sight of all the reality and purposes of prayer in the rabid disputes of how prayer should be offered up,—was a spectacle for men and angels!

Maggie held with her husband; though she yawned all through the sermon, and frequently came to afternoon church in a state of drowsy half-tipsiness.

Her father, the old miller, went to the Free Kirk; her mother to the Established, 'as a decent body ought;' and they agreed in little except in being generally 'fou' on a Sunday evening.

Lady Clochnaben was Presbyterian; and so was Miss Alice Ross; and both these ladies belonged also to that wide-spread and influential sect, the Pharisees. They were continually thanking God that they were better than their neighbours; and lost in contemplation of the mote in their brother's eye.

On the morning that Alice had chosen to ride over to the grim grey castle on the misty hills, Lady Clochnaben had received a letter from Lorimer which extremely displeased her: a letter in answer to one of her own, in which she expressed her intention to give her 'most determined opposition' to schemes of the sort set on foot in the neighbouring parish by Mr. Heaton, and requested Lorimer to remonstrate with Sir Douglas Ross respecting the conduct of that gentleman.

She called her son's attention to a report of proceedings elsewhere, respecting the consecration of a cemetery; sending it thickly interspersed, at its impressive passages, with dashes from her firm hand in rigorous lines of ink. She said Savile Heaton had defended his opinions by the absurd and overstrained piece of reasoning,—that God having chosen to make the body the visible temple of a living soul, it behoved man surely to lay back the clay He had so honoured, with reverent farewell prayer, in the earth which he also created. She considered the extract she sent 'a full and sufficient answer to such twaddle.' Such sentences as the following met with her especial approval:—

'This was a Presbyterian country; where the consecration of burying-grounds was not only considered a thing of no use, but was condemned as superstitious and allied to Popery. Consecration of the solid portions of the cemetery was an insult to the proprietors of the ground. Churchyards and churches, and many other places, were consecrated many hundred years ago; but the Reformation swept these consecrations away; the will of the nation reduced them to nonentities. To consecrate would be to give the Episcopalians a right to the service of burial. Why should such favour be shown to Episcopalians? Presbyterians, who had acquired rights of burial in the same ground, might justly feel themselves aggrieved: and others might feel only merriment and surprise that such a ceremony had been indulged in at all. It was good for nothing. The cemetery was neither the better nor the worse for it: though it might indeed lead to a feeling against the cemetery in the minds of Presbyterians, *who would not use it as they might otherwise have done.*'

Could Lady Clochnaben have seen the gloomy and contemptuous smile with which Lorimer read the last sentence, descriptive of the repugnance a right-minded Presbyterian would feel at the notion of being buried in ground defiled by consecration, she would have been still more provoked at his answer; which abruptly said:—

'With reference to your expectation that I should write to

Douglas to interfere with Mr. Heaton about the burying-ground, I wonder you do not see that I can do no such thing; nor if I did, could my meddling be of any possible use. As to my feelings on the subject, if people prefer to be buried like dogs, let them be so buried; but I quite agree with Savile Heaton, that the clay which once held a human soul should not be returned to its parent earth as we shoot out rubbish on a midden; and I cannot see why a piece of ground which is of neither use nor value to the present community, should remain useless, merely because people were formerly so buried in it. The consecration will not, I presume, affect the poor dust lying there; though, by the report you send me, it may discourage future corpses of the Presbyterian persuasion.'

'This comes of residing abroad, you see, Alice,' said the Dowager, as she gave a vicious tightening to the folds of the letter, and then tapped it with her bony fore-finger. 'Lorimer has grown into a Latitudinarian, and, for aught I know, into something worse. But I'm just resolved to fight out this matter, and I'll do it. The very idea of the Torrieburn folk makes me sick; and if you can't crush a man one way, you can another—that's my dictum.'

Whether, like the wrathful king who rashly said of Thomas à Becket that he wondered he had no subject who would rid him of that priest, and so procured his murder,—the angry Dowager expressed before any very unscrupulous party her opinion that the place would be well rid of Mr. Heaton,—cannot be clearly known; but his position, never a very comfortable one, was made more and more intolerable by a series of small and great annoyances, the last of which was attended with some danger, not only to him, but to Gertrude Ross, and Sir Douglas.

An anxious consultation had been held, as to the terms on which Mrs. Kenneth Ross of Torrieburn, now Mrs. Heaton, should stand with the young Lady Ross. Alice had resolutely stood out, even in her loneliest days, against any communication with her. 'She was not recognised by her mother,' was her sole observation when pressed on the subject.

But Gertrude leaned to peace; and to that quiet dealing with unfortunate events in families, so seldom adopted—though, if the dignity of reserve towards the world, on which such apparent indulgence is founded, were more common, scandals would be kept private which the world only mocks at, and the persons affected by them would be the happier. It was decided that Lady Ross should pay her visit to Torrieburn.

To 'cut' the widow of Sir Douglas's brother,—the wife of the

clergyman who had brought Kenneth up,—would have been a very harsh and difficult step to take. Intimacy was not desirable, was not probable; but countenance and acknowledgment towards one so nearly connected with Sir Douglas, seemed almost imperative.

To Torrieburn, Gertrude drove with her husband; and shuddered over the account he gave, at the fatal bridge by the Falls, of the death of his brother. Her mind still full of the tragic tale, and of the description of Maggie herself in her youthful beauty, Gertrude entered the drawing-room, and was received by the occupant.

Mr. Heaton was a shy, earnest-looking man, who spoke very little, and kept glancing at his wife as if all the years that had passed had failed to quiet his expectations of her doing or saying something that would shock others.

Maggie herself was beginning to grow rather fat and coarse, though still handsome. She was dressed in the most *outré* style of the fashion, according to that peculiar faith in milliners which makes English, Scotch, and Irish women believe that they ought to put on, at their own firesides, toilettes which the French either never wear at all; or only wear when dressed for visiting, and driving in the Bois de Boulogne.

Maggie was a hundred times ‘finer’ than the bride; and with her finery she had adopted a sort of affectedly jolly, defiant manner, by which she intended to show that she neither desired to be patronised, nor would submit to be ‘looked down upon.’

All she said and did, jarred with the feelings of compassion and interest with which Gertrude’s mind had been filled.

As to Maggie, she saw Gertrude with bitter prejudice. Kenneth,—her wild, insolent, vain Kenneth,—had not observed the silence practised by Lorimer Boyd towards his dowager mother. He had told his less awful parent that he was in love, and was beloved again; and Maggie, remembering all his letters, took the view consequent upon them; namely, that she saw before her the jilting coquette who had ‘thrown over’ the young lover, to become possessed of Glenrossie Castle, and make a more wealthy marriage.

The visit was awkward and embarrassed, in spite of gentle efforts at cordiality on the part of the bride; all unconscious as she was of what was passing in Maggie’s mind.

At length she said to the latter that she would like to clamber up the Falls and look down on the view; and ‘Mrs. Ross-Heaton,’ as she called herself, prepared to accompany her. When they had nearly reached the head of the Falls, and while a thick screen of mountain-ash and birch still hid the house they had left from view,

a loud report startled them ; and, looking through the trees, they saw smoke issuing from one of the windows.

Descending rapidly, they retraced their steps towards the dwelling they had so lately left, and found Sir Douglas and Savile Heaton standing in front of the house, angrily commenting on some disaster that had just taken place.

On examination it was found that the iron bush of a cart-wheel—tightly plugged up at both ends with wood, in one of which a hole had been drilled, through which it had been filled with gunpowder, with a fuse inserted so as to form a grenade,—had been placed under the window of the drawing-room where they had been talking, and fired.

The bush had burst into splinters ; spreading in all directions ; passing through the window and ceiling, and lodging in the floor of the room above. Glass was shattered ; furniture broken ; the smell of gunpowder still floated on the air. Maggie did not scream ; she stood panting and staring for a few seconds, and then with excessive fierceness she exclaimed, ‘ I’d be glad their necks were ground in our mill ! ’

After which speech she flung herself into the arms of her husband ; and there continued sobbing wildly, till she saw, or imagined she saw, the retreating form of a man among the bushes ; when she suddenly ceased weeping, and sprang forward, with an activity very surprising in so cumbersome a figure.

No one was discoverable however, and she came slowly back again.

Her husband spoke kindly to her, and bade her take farewell of Sir Douglas and Gertrude, which she did somewhat sullenly ; Sir Douglas reiterating to Mr. Heaton assurances of assistance and goodwill.

Gertrude was very silent during the drive home. She had been frightened and bewildered ; and much that she found at Glenrossie was so disappointing. Maggie, so coarse and strange ; Alice, so ungenial and alien she scarcely knew why. The squabbles about religious forms, which had been discussed before her, so hideous and yet so trifling !

She sighed, and turned to Sir Douglas, who had also been silently ruminating. She took his true frank hand, and he bent and kissed her as she sat silently there by his side.

Much was disappointing ; but what could quench the joy of that love ? Much was disappointing ; but Sir Douglas, her own Douglas, was perfect ; and she was his ‘ for ever ! ’

CHAPTER XXI.

MAMMA'S LETTER.

PARADISE had a cloud over it after this. Gertrude could not comprehend bitterness : she had never felt it. Holy thoughts, with her, were peaceful thoughts. She talked a great deal with Mr. Heaton over his troubles and anxieties, and produced a corresponding degree of displeasure in rigid Lady Clochnaben, and watchful Alice Ross. Her principles were very lax, in their opinion. She had even been guilty, one Sabbath evening, of singing. Sir Douglas had caught cold out fishing ; his eyes were inflamed ; he could not read or occupy himself in any way, and his wife opened her well-worn music-book, and sat down to amuse him with her little store of melodies, in the most natural way in the world. Lady Clochnaben was spending a couple of days at Glenrossie. She stared at the bride ; and, clutching the two arms of the high-backed chair in which she was seated, so as to give herself a stiffer and more authoritative pose, she said sternly, 'Lady Ross, you're surely forgetting what day it is !'

Gertrude looked wonderingly round.

'Gertie only remembers that it is the day after I have taken cold,' laughed Sir Douglas.

'You should not encourage such doings at Glenrossie,' said the Dowager severely ; 'there never was mirth or singing since I can remember the place, on such an improper day as the Lord's-day.'

'I really do not understand,' said Gertrude.

'Don't you know, Gertie,' said Sir Douglas, 'that we Caledonians are so strict in our observance of the Sabbath, that singing and such-like diversions are forbidden ? There is a sad story extant, of a lady who lost her pet dog for ever,—because, when it strayed, the gentleman friend she was walking with was afraid to whistle for it, on account of the day being Sunday.'

'The Lord forgive us. Is *that* the way you mean to instruct your wife !' exclaimed the fearless Dowager ; setting her spectacles at Sir Douglas.

Alice said nothing. She looked up with a plaintive, pitiful glance, at her half-brother ; shook her head slightly, as much as to say, 'This will never do !' and then, slowly rising, with a volume of

explanations of the prophecies of Ezekiel in her hand, she crept away from the profanity, and went to bed.

Gertrude rather pined for her mother, in this alienated state of things; she had been used to love and petting from that tender though weak-minded companion. But the youthful-elderly was making a happy little 'season' in London. She was in no hurry to leave the metropolis; to forsake the circle of recovered friends, and discourage their invitations by burying herself in the Highlands.

'I will come to you, my darling,' she wrote, 'but not just yet. I would like to come in the autumn, when you have a nice shooting party, and then see your hills and heather bracs. I have such a pretty little house in Park Street! such a sunny drawing-room, and a little boudoir (you know how I love a boudoir), with a Louis Quatorze looking-glass, and a quantity of lovely little odds and ends. I was lucky to get it! It was advertised as a "bachelor" house, and now they say it belonged to a "bachelor of the other sex;" but that makes no difference. I mean it does not signify to me who lived here before me, of course. And indeed the proof that it doesn't signify at all, is, that all my friends call, and call, till you'd think they would never have done calling! And I am constantly asked out to dinner, when they want a lady in a hurry and some one has failed, and in the same way I am asked to accompany young married friends to the opera. I assure you I have spent a very pleasant time, and am quite pleased to see how little forgotten I am; for I certainly thought people rather cold about your wedding; but then we had only just arrived, and I had not gone the round with my cards, you know.

'There has been a magnificent *fête* at Devonshire House, and the Duke came up to me directly, and said how rejoiced he was to see me, and that he did not think I had altered *the least* in the last fifteen years. And he asked after you, too—at least, he asked after "my children;" and when I told him I had lost my poor boy, and that my other child was a daughter who was grown up and married, he seemed quite surprised! And only that he was obliged at the moment to go and be civil to somebody else, I meant to have seized the opportunity of begging him to remember *you* when you came to town; but you can call there with me, and that will do as well,—I mean as well as my speaking about you.

'And now, dear, I will conclude, and promise faithfully to come to you later in the year. You know it is said to be as well, after marriage, to "leave the young couple awhile to themselves." Excuse my *little joke*; for, of course, you are not a "young" couple: I mean

Sir Douglas is not young, though you are ; and *that* made the joke ; but it need not vex you, for he is a great deal handsomer than any young man I see going about, and I always thought him handsomer even than his saucy nephew, of whom I hope you have good news, and that he will keep out of the way.

‘ Your ever affectionate Mother,

‘ CHARLOTTE SKIFTON.

‘ P.S.—My dearest Gertie, I re-open my letter, because I really cannot let it go without telling you such a piece of good news ! I have just got my card for one of the Royal Balls !

‘ I went, you know, to the Drawing-room, the very first thing I did, after all the fuss of your marriage, &c., was over ; but the Court being new, and all that, I really did not feel sanguine about being remembered : and I can’t tell you how pleased I was when I opened the big envelope just now, and out came the Lord Chamberlain’s card !

‘ I went to the Drawing-room in very dark garter blue, with my few diamonds very prettily arranged : and I did think of wearing pink for this occasion, but perhaps it would be thought too *young*, you know ; people are not good-natured : so I shall go in pale silver grey and pearls, or in mauve. I understand mauve is Her Majesty’s favourite colour ; but perhaps for that very reason she may be wearing it herself ; and that would incline me to the gray, especially as I have not been to a Court ball since your poor father died ; and I have always thought a widow should wear very quiet colours, at all events for a good while after her mourning is over.

‘ I suppose you will attend the very first Drawing-room next season ? Sir Douglas must wish that : and you will have plenty of time to think about it beforehand. I advise you to employ Madame Albertine Chiffonne ; she is just come to set up in London, and is quite the rage among the fine ladies, and very busy. But she has promised, however overwhelmed with orders she may be, that she will give *me* the preference first ; and was uncommonly civil.

‘ I have Isidor as coiffeur ; I think he has more taste than Cavalier. He amused me very much with stories of how busy he was at the Coronation of our Queen Victoria. He said he dressed a hundred and fifty-four heads between the evening and next morning. It sounds very incredible, don’t it ? but then a good many had their heads dressed overnight ; and slept or sat up in arm-chairs, or leaning back on the sofas ; and a good many met at each other’s houses,—to save time, and make sure of Isidor,—and

they sat in a long row, while he and his assistants brushed, and oiled, and plaited, and twisted, and twirled, till he said he had scarcely any sensation left in his fingers and thumbs !

‘ And the old Marchioness of Timberly was so afraid he would be tired, and not finish her head off properly (being one of the last), that she kept offering him claret every two minutes, saying, “ Take another glass, Mr. Isidor. I think your hand droops.” “ Certainly,” he said, “ if I had swallowed all the wine that old lady offered me, I should no longer have distinguished where the heads were that I was to dress.”

‘ And what do you think, Gertie, of the speech of that handsome, eccentric Mrs. Cregan, whom Lorimer Boyd used to admire so—when I told *her* the story ? She said, “ More fools they ! I rolled my hair in a smooth twist, and walked across the Park to Westminster, in the cool early morning, with my brother ; for I considered it a day on which of all days in the year I was least likely to be looked at, and most likely to endure great fatigue. I knew the streets would be crowded ; the carriages dead-locked from their numbers ; and the only thing I wished I *had* taken overnight, was my breakfast ; for it was impossible to get the servants to attend to anything on that eventful morning.”

‘ So like Mrs. Cregan, wasn’t it ? taking things in that cool sort of way. I dare say just as cool about the Royal balls.’

‘ Well, I ain’t like her, Gertie, and I declare my hand quite shakes while I write to you about it, only I thought you would be glad to know Her Most Gracious Majesty had not forgotten me, but has sent me a card.

‘ This P.S. has grown quite to the length of another letter, but you can’t wonder at that, because of what I had to say.

‘ Your affectionate Mum,
‘ C. S.’

‘ Here is a visitor you will be glad to see, Gertrude,’ said Sir Douglas, cheerily, opening the door just as Gertrude had got to the end of the little fine *pattes de mouche* of her mother’s writing. Here is Lorimer, on a two months’ leave, come to look after Clochnaben ! You must persuade him to give us as much as he can of his time. You are lady of the Castle now, you know.’

Gertrude rose, and fixed her glad soft eyes on Lorimer’s countenance ; not without a certain degree of nervous trepidation, remembering all that had occurred, and the confidence she had placed

in him, when Kenneth's reckless love-making and yet more reckless threats, made her fear she scarcely knew what, for Sir Douglas.

Lorimer also seemed a little nervous; though his manner was generally impassive. His hand was icy-cold as he took hers, and his eyes were averted. He gave a short stifled sigh, and stood for a moment in one of the oriel windows.

'It is a long time since I was here,' he said.

The sadness with which he spoke was so obvious, that Gertrude longed to ask him if aught had occurred to fret him: but there are men whose reserve you dare not break through, however real your sympathy may be with their supposed sorrow. Lorimer was one of these men.

Gertrude felt embarrassed: and, to help her embarrassment, she held out her mother's letter.

'I have just heard from mamma,' she said; 'you can read her news if you like.'

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WORLD AS IT IS.

A SMILE, half amused, half contemptuous, stole over Lorimer's gloomy face as he silently laid the letter down.

'It is very pleasant to know mamma is so well satisfied, is it not?' said Gertrude. 'When first we came to England she thought people were not quite kind: that old friends had half forgotten her. I am so glad she is happy, and that all invite and welcome her.'

'Well, I also am glad she is happy; though for the life of me I never can understand these artificial joys and sorrows. I wonder if you, Gertrude, will ever gradually become so enamoured of adventitious distinction, as to feel flurried at getting an opera-box, or a big Chamberlain's card?'

'I should like to be noticed by all friends and by my sovereign.'

'That might not follow. These things are done by lists in the Chamberlain's office; often very carelessly and capriciously done; *always* with a great amount of favouritism; not the least in the way your poor mother supposes: and, when all is done, you are one of a crowd of ten or twelve hundred persons, the majority of whom perhaps never get a glimpse of their sovereign.'

‘But I believe,’ said Gertrude eagerly, ‘that mamma was a very great beauty, and very much noticed at Court formerly; and her return to these scenes would not be unobserved. And then to come back to England, and all things English, after such long wandering absence—such sorrowful absence—that in itself must be happiness. Ah! how my father yearned to be well enough to return!’ and she paused and sighed.

‘Well,’ said Lorimer, ‘you, Gertrude, who are so fond of Italy and far-off lands, and have been away till you are half a foreigner, might be amazed and interested by hearing how little of “England and all things English,” there is, at all events, in this Court to which Lady Charlotte returns.’

‘The English Court?’

‘The English Court. What should you say if I told you that our royal family are in fact Italians and Germans; the German element predominating? the house of Brunswick springs from Albert Azo, Marquis of Tuscany, a prince of Lombardy, who is said to have lived to the ripe age of a hundred and one. He married, in 1040, Cunigunde, heiress of the first Welfs or Guelphs, Earls of Altorff, in Swabia. Their son, Guelph IV. of Esté, obtained the Duchy of Bavaria from Henry IV., and is the acknowledged head of the Guelph family. And then you get down a long line of foreign princes; past Henry Guelph, who lost Bavaria; past Guelph VI. and his romantic dealings with Conrad III.; past Henry Otho, the friend of Richard Cœur de Lion; past Ernest the Pious of Zell (one of that group of princes of the Empire who were first called Protestants); past the fiery old soldier, Prince Christian—who, losing an arm in battle when marching to relieve Bergen-op-Zoom, always afterwards wore a silver one. Past all sorts of confused links and intermarriages; till George Lewis married Sophia Dorothy of Zell, and was the first prince of the race that wore the British crown,—and spoke broken English to his British subjects.’

‘I suppose I ought to know it all; but I never thought of it till you told me.’

‘No. And, if we were to stand on our nationalities as a merit, and on the antiquity of families not royal, but at all events titled—perhaps some of the lower order of Scotch and Irish, and the humblest of English families, might make their boast of a more direct descent than what are called the aristocracy of our land.

‘The latter are fond of boasting that they “came over with the Conqueror,”—

“From Norroway, from Norroway, from Norroway o’er the faem,”

as the old ballad puts it. Ah ! what folly it all seems, sometimes, when one sits and thinks it over ; this adoration of pomps and splendours ! And how the quaint old text preached by the priest Saunders, in Wat Tyler's time, comes to mind :—

“ When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman ? ”

‘ But would you put aside all distinctions if you had your way, Lorimer ? I think you would find that impossible. ’

‘ No, I would not put them aside if it *were* possible. God made gradation ; it is no invention of man's. He made strength and weakness of body, clearness or dulness of intellect, capacity and incapacity of all sorts ; as He made men and angels. I object only to the inordinate value set on *accidental* distinctions : distinctions inherited or acquired in some way totally independent of any merit in the possessor : perhaps possessed by persons of singular demerit. I hold the sort of blind adulation offered to mere rank, wealth, and what is called “ position,” to be as much an intoxication of the understanding, as the state of a man who rises tipsy from table. “ Drunken, but not with wine,”—according to the Scriptural phrase. Drunken at the careless feast of life, and incapable of seeing things in their true light or relative proportion. In Spain and in Austria I think it is rank and high descent that people are drunk about ; and in England I am not sure but that it is wealth. ’

‘ Ah ! yes ; because wealth commands so many other things. ’

‘ Yes. Apparent splendour and good living—even if he does not share them—if he has no chance of sharing them—fill an Englishman's heart or brain with respect for the owner of these advantages. ’

‘ Not only Englishmen,’ said Gertrude, smiling.

‘ No ; it is in weak human nature : riches dazzle like light. There is a very ingenious and humorous story in a very old collection of Italian tales by one Sercambi, which represents the poet Dante as being invited by some king to dinner. He comes dressed very shabbily ; sits below the salt ; and is overlooked and forgotten till after the feast ; when the king says, “ By the by, what is become of that poet I intended to talk to ? ” Dante, who has meanwhile departed a good deal offended, is immediately followed and invited anew. He comes to supper, superbly dressed in crimson and gold, and is served with extreme attention ; but the courtiers observe with amazement that he pours the soup down his sleeves ; tucks cutlets into his bosom ; and smears his velvet jerkin with rich sauces. “ Good gracious, your majesty ! ” says the boldest of these supping

nobles ; “ why has this poet such *bruttezza* in his manners ? ” The question is passed on by the king to Dante,—who gravely replies :—“ When I came here dressed shabbily, and sat quietly in my corner, I was forgotten and overlooked. I now come in very fine clothes, and am very much attended to ; I therefore concluded it was rather my clothes than myself that you admired and invited, and I was willing to bestow on them a share of your hospitality.”’

Gertrude laughed.

‘ Well,’ said she, ‘ you confess it is a very old story, and one applicable to many countries and many phases of society ; and it is inherent in human nature to be dazzled by splendour. The savage, whose tawny neck is hung with beads, and whose hair is spiked with parrots’ tails, is an object of the greatest admiration and envy, rely upon it, to his less festooned comrades.’

‘ Of course he is : leave it therefore to savages, and not to tutored minds, to adore tinsel.’

‘ But it is not the tinsel they adore ; it is the symbol of a condition beyond and above their own.’

‘ We shall argue in a circle, since I come back to the denial of such appearances being just evidence of a condition above and beyond their own. Oh, Gertrude, one of your greatest charms is the utter unworldliness, the true perception, the natural independence of your mind ! and I should grieve with a grief of which you can know nothing, if contact with the world altered you. You have seen nothing of life yet, but its real joys and real sorrows.’

‘ Do you think,’ said she gently, ‘ that such a preparation will make me more likely to set false value on those which you term “ artificial ” joys and sorrows ? ’

‘ I scarcely know what I expect,’ said Lorimer gloomily. ‘ We are told we cannot touch pitch without being defiled ; and why should I hope that you will live in the world your mother is so desirous to see you enter, without gradually adopting some of the views held there ?—false, narrow, absurd views.’

‘ You have lived in that world yourself, and you see how opposite is the result.’

“ ‘ Among them, but not of them,’ like Lord Byron’s *Aurora Raby* ; so innocent and unspoilable is my nature,’ said Lorimer.

‘ There, you said that with one of your own grim old smiles ! You look, at last, more like yourself,’ said Gertrude, smiling also.

‘ Have I not been looking like myself ? I think that must be a change for the better.’

‘ No, you have been looking much more gloomy than I ever saw

you. You must have grown gloomier because I went away from Naples and left you.'

She spoke the sentence playfully. For a moment Lorimer Boyd turned to her with an expression she had never seen in his face : a sort of fierce wistfulness. Then he again averted his eyes, and said, after a brief pause,—

'Yes ; I missed you. You see it does not do to leave a sullen man too much alone. Now take me out, and let me walk with you on the terrace, and see the improvements Douglas has made before and since he came to have your help. The poets assure us that all things smile in the sunshine : perhaps I shall smile also, and grow quite genial and jolly.'

And Gertrude laughed a merry laugh as she led the way out, for the epithets 'genial' and 'jolly' were certainly anything but applicable to her friend Lorimer Boyd.

Sir Douglas met them as they advanced.

'Twice have I passed under those windows, and called to you,' he said : 'and you two were in such absorbed discourse you did not notice me.'

'Yes? Mr. Boyd has been talking in a most republican and American manner. I do not know what Lady Clochnaben would say if she could have heard him. I believe he would be disowned, thrown off, and left entirely dependent on our indulgent willingness to shelter him while in Scotland.'

'I have been merely generalising, to prevent too entire a dependence on the flatteries of kings, courts, and grandees, now that Gertrude is to live among English fine ladies,' said Lorimer. 'I do not wish her soul's wings to be caught in the cobwebs.'

The eager hand of Sir Douglas caught Gertrude's with a sudden clasp, and held it.

'My wife,' said he, with a proud, confident smile, 'will never have to depend on the frowns or smiles of kings, courts, or fine ladies. We will make a world of our own, and she shall be queen of it. I do not think she will give me much trouble by her desire to overstep those boundaries ; and as to you, my dear Lorimer, you will preach in vain to get the cobwebs that catch meaner hearts swept away. When Cinderella drove out in an enchanted pumpkin, she was saluted and cheered ; but when she ran barefoot home, she was very naturally taken for a beggar. Gertrude shall keep a cheerful medium between these two states.'

He kissed his wife's hand gaily, and gently released it, and she smiled shyly in his face. Lorimer shrank alike from the smile and

the light caress. That happy security of wedded love smote him like a blow.

And in the midst of all his own new-found happiness Sir Douglas felt instinctively that there was, in his old friend, some inexplicable change; some cloud of mingled grief, discontent, and bitterness, that pained and puzzled him. He loved Lorimer Boyd very dearly, very heartily; he had no *half-love* to give any one: he longed to say to him, as when they were young lads at Eton, 'What ails you, Lorimer?'

But, intimate as they were, that passionate brave man dared not ask his reserved and gloomy friend what ailed him.

'Not ev'n the nearest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh'—

and he was fain to remain ignorant of the reasons for smiling or sighing of his former chum and schoolfellow. Only now and then, as he thought it over, he wished Lorimer might find 'a help meet for him,' and so learn to see life in its most cheerful aspect.

And meanwhile it is not to be supposed that Lorimer sulked and sighed all day long. On the contrary, his visit was replete with pleasure and interest to those who welcomed him; and, after the first few strange hours, that curiously rapid familiarity with new objects and conditions of things, which those who have travelled much, or had great experience of life, must have been conscious of in their own minds,—that acceptance of, and adaptation to, circumstances and scenes which, from being vivid and startling, soon compose themselves into the every-day colouring of existence,—came to him also, with a certain sense of relief and calm. And it seemed to him that for years Gertrude had been doing the honours of Glenrossie Castle. Choosing for him a room with a pleasant aspect; bending her graceful head over the well-furnished writing-table, to see that all was there that his busy hand could want; and cheerily notifying to him the breakfast, dinner, and post hours in the house of his friend.

Almost he smiled 'one of his old grim smiles' as she called them; when, left alone in his bachelor apartment, and, leaning back in the easy-chair with folded arms, and eyes musingly fixed on the old-fashioned cornices, he compared the *stunned* sensation which he had experienced during the first hour of his arrival, with the settled freedom of thought, and quiet conviction, that there he was,—after years of acquaintance with Gertrude Skifton, and much communion with her in afflicting as well as trivial scenes,—at length

a visitor in her home as a married woman ; the wife of his old friend Douglas, who had drawn that excellent prize in life's uncertain lottery.

And Gertrude, passing back from her hospitable little cares to her husband's dressing-room, pressed a thankful kiss on his forehead as she said, ' I am so glad he is come ; I hope he will enjoy his visit here. Only think of that good, faithful, pleasant friend, being son to that dreadful old Lady Clochnaben, and brother to that sick slug, who thinks of nothing but himself from morning to night ! I am so glad he is come.'

And then she sat down on a low *prie-dieu*, half occupied in reading a book, half in watching, with eyes of exceeding love and admiration, Old Sir Douglas : though, sooth to say, he was doing nothing more admirable than perusing with very slender interest the *Edinburgh Courant* and other daily papers. And, as she watched him, with enamoured eyes, she thought surely no one ever yet so exactly answered the description given in some fragmentary lines of Leigh Hunt's :—

' No courtier's face, although the smile was ready ;
Nor scholar's, though the look was deep and steady ;
Nor soldier's, for the power was more of mind,
Too true for violence and too refined :
And wheresoe'er his fine frank eyes were thrown,
He drew the hearts he wished for to his own.'

And, so musing, Gertrude decided within herself that she certainly was one of the most blessed and fortunate of married women.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WISER THAN THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT.

WHEN feline Alice found another subject for her watchful powers had become an inmate at Glenrossie, she purred more softly, and moved more circuitously, and sat more quietly, in window-nooks than ever.

She also made more visits than ever to Clochnaben ; and, indeed, in nothing did she more resemble the analogous cat, than in her swift and sudden disappearances and apparitions—that mixture of slowness and swiftness peculiar to Grimalkin.

You saw her stealing along in the sunshine by the broad yew hedge, and thought her still in the garden ; when, lo ! she eluded your eye, and was off in a noiseless scamper round the wall, and through the gate, and over the hill. If you met her face to face (which was the rarest of accidents), your presence seemed to give the same signal for flight that it always does to the cat. She might be doing no harm whatever ; she never *was* doing any visible harm ; only prowling along, with a book, or a few flowers, or a half-eaten peach. But instantly, with a sort of whisk like pussy's flexile tail, the light shawl was thrown together ; the book seemed to close of itself ; and that, or the half-eaten peach, or the gathered flowers, half vanished under its fringe, grasped by a little pale-fingered hand. If her greeting was not an absolute ' mew,' it was seldom a more articulate sound ; and then she passed you.

She never turned to walk with you. Not once, on those few occasions when Gertrude had thus encountered her, had such an attempt at companionship taken place. She passed slowly, and disappeared swiftly. You could not say she ran away,—but somehow, she was gone. As to the frank audible ' Good morning,' or ' What a sweet evening,'—or any allusion to rain, frost, sunshine, shade, blossom, or fruit, such as generally marks this sort of meeting in familiar haunts, between inmates of the same dwelling,—her little colourless mouth had never shaped such syllables to any one.

Gertrude had wasted much gentle pity at first upon her sister-in-law : she had set all down to the habitual loneliness of her life. The pity of affectionate natures is often wasted thus. The impulsive cannot comprehend the impassive. Warm words and tender approaches are expected by them to subvert a condition of things as changeless as if the flint-stones of the bare sea-beach were watered to produce a crop of primroses.

At first, Alice made a visible (though very cautious) attempt to please Lorimer Boyd. It was her habit. No one could tell how the conversation perpetually fell on topics familiar to him. No one could say how this grave slow-speaking young female had learned so much of international law ; nor where she could have picked up her odd particulars of diplomatic tradition—from embassies to Attila down to the receptions of Queen Elizabeth ; from the gossiping inventions of ancient Lord Malmsbury, to the *menu* of the festival dinners given by Lord Castlemaine in the last embassy sent by England to the Pope. All which topics she handled without much sequence or order, but in a natural innocent way as if Lorimer's

presence had merely reminded her of them, and roused in her, as it were, one of her habitual and favourite trains of thought.

But Lorimer Boyd was not a man easily flattered or easily taken in. In his own way, he was as much a watcher of those he associated with as Alice herself. It was watch for watch. She was Douglas's half-sister, and he was rather curious to decide what sort of a woman the daughter of that icy Lady Ross had turned out; he vaguely remembered thinking her a most repellent little specimen of girlhood, when he and Douglas were boys; but his judgment of her now was more favourable. When first Gertrude asked him in one of their walks, 'What do you think of Alice?' he answered readily enough: 'Well, she seems a harmless little "crittur," with a good deal of shrewdness and intelligence.'

But, towards the close of the second week of his visit, it happened that Sir Douglas and Alice set off for a ride together, and Lorimer Boyd, after assisting to adjust the habit of the lady, and handing her a little whip as slender and flexible as herself, looked after her in a musing manner for a minute or two; then turning to Gertrude, he said, 'That is a very nice pony of your sister-in-law's, and would take a long day easily. I should not be surprised if she rode a broom-stick at night.'

'Ah!' laughed Gertrude, 'and a little while ago you said she was a "harmless creature."'

'Yes. I thought so then. I do not think so now. I think she is a creature full of harm. But Douglas does not.'

'No. Douglas is fond of her, and she is getting less afraid of him.'

'Afraid of Douglas! Miss Ross afraid! Rely upon it, Gertrude, she fears nothing in this world. And I much doubt if she fears anything in the next.'

'She would be greatly surprised if she heard your last remark: for she is stricter than strict as to her religious theories.'

'Theories?—yes. Our religious theories are for our neighbours; the *practice* is for ourselves.'

'Well! we will talk of something pleasanter. You can't think how painful it was to me to find I could not like Douglas's sister. He has so few relations, and this the only near one. I wish you were his brother; though, I believe, even then he could not love you better than he does.'

That very evening did Sir Douglas confide to his wife (making poor Gertrude feel quite guilty in consequence of her memory of the morning's conversation) that he thought it would be a remarkably

happy chance if Lorimer were to fall in love with Alice ; that it would be a most suitable choice ; Alice being extremely sensible and fond of grave employments, and no longer a mere girl—which would just suit Lorimer.

He even attempted, in his own unsophisticated way, to further this chance, and open the eyes of Boyd to her merits, by saying one day, ‘ Don’t you think there is something very remarkable in Alice, in spite of her quiet ways ? ’ And Lorimer’s answer was, ‘ Yes, indeed I do.’ But, whether grim smile, or grim tone, destroyed the value of the verbal acquiescence, it is certain that Sir Douglas felt so much irritation at the reply, that he rejoined rather testily, ‘ You have lived so much abroad, Lorimer, that I don’t think a quiet Scotch or English woman has any chance of pleasing you.’

Lorimer did not speak. He was looking at Gertrude, whose cheek had flushed suddenly during the brief colloquy. He thought of days at Naples, when angry insolent Kenneth had spoken of *her* as ‘ one of your quiet girls,’ from whom much evidence of preference could not be expected. Ah ! how unlike the quiet of Douglas’s half-sister was the nature of his wife, and how strange that the man who so truly loved the one could be taken in by the other !

Strange as it might be, however, in Mr. Boyd’s opinion, Sir Douglas leaned greatly to his half-sister. And the inexplicable result of all was, that Alice—aware instinctively that, instead of pleasing, she displeased—withdrew as cautiously as she had advanced. She then adopted a certain manner of being timid and rather ill-used ; ill-used in not being more liked, and more petted ; but wistful and sorrowful, because of course it was her own fault ; it could only be her own fault that she did not please more ! She would engage as formerly in the conversation, and then suddenly grow mute ; give out little meagre sentences, and cease ; as knowing that her talk was not wanted, was not welcome. She would answer Gertrude’s call of ‘ Are you coming too, Ailie ? ’ by a doubtful dropping of her work or book, and a sort of appeal to Sir Douglas if he happened to be present, ‘ Oh ! I don’t know ; do you think they really want me, or that Lady Ross says it out of kindness ? I feel so *de trop*—they know each other so well, and I don’t know Mr. Boyd at all. Oh ! no—let me go with you. I will wait till you go—please let me ! .

Once, indeed, she even ventured to say, after long silence and leaning of her head on her hand, with a sort of wondering sigh. ‘ Can I have offended Mr. Boyd in any way ; or is it only that I bore him ? ’

Which speech so touched honest Sir Douglas that he suddenly

stooped and kissed her on the forehead, saying at the same time, 'My dear Ailie, how can you be so foolish? How could you bore any one? I'm sure you are better informed than most women. But Lorimer was always rather an odd fellow.'

And 'Ailie' was quite satisfied with this result of her dejected remark; but she only replied humbly, 'Do you think so? But you are so good, Douglas; so very good; so good to *every* one!'

So good to every one, that even to her (poor waif and stray as she must consider herself), even to *her*, some little share of manna must fall and be gathered. That was the tone taken by Ailie, in pursuance of the 'tactics' of Ailie. But if gallant and frank Sir Douglas could but have seen her in her turret chamber, an hour or so afterwards,—how extremely startled and puzzled would that excellent soldier have been!

Standing on tiptoe; watching; leaning up against the shutter of her high window. Twisting and untwisting, with slow though restless fingers, the long boa of light-coloured fur which was coiled round her neck, to protect her throat from the evening air; her eyes half-closed, as short-sighted persons habitually close them to assist their vision—giving out a sort of trembling glitter; her brows set in a hard frown, and her lips in a compressed smile; the union of which contradictory expressions makes up the 'demoniac' pattern, followed in Mephistophiles, and such-like representations.

If he could have seen her!

And all because Clochnaben's brother would not like *her*, and she knew, from old Lady Clochnaben, that he had liked her sister-in-law! And she wondered now,—as unconscious Gertrude advanced with her companion up the steep terraces to the oaken doors,—how all would turn out, and whether they were talking of her, or of old times, or what.

As she watched, they stopped; a short distance from the entrance. Gertrude had been smiling; now she looked suddenly grave; more than grave; her face wore a look of painful pity; Lorimer was telling her something that moved her greatly. What could it be? Presently he struck with his cane at the lower branch of one of two stunted old fir-trees, whose picturesque appearance saved them from being uprooted and carted away for firewood.

Then, all of a sudden, it flashed upon Alice Ross what Lorimer was narrating! He was telling the memorable story of the hanging of the two dogs, which preceded the sending of Douglas to Eton, where he and Douglas first became friends. No doubt abusing her mother, and making out a fine story of ill-usage and cruelty to the

boys, long ago. And, though Alice had not loved her mother (being indeed herself too much of that mother's nature), she resented the supposed abuse. She would have liked to have thrown a sharp stone at the speaker: to have shot a poisoned arrow at him: but he and Gertrude passed on, under the archway; and the fierce illumination of Alice's cat-like eyes subsided as she turned away from the window, and prepared to smooth her hair and dress in soft and white muslin, and go into dinner with a noiseless velvety step, leaning humbly on her brother's arm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GODLY FOLK, AND RELIGIOUS FOLK.

'Is it not most unnatural that you should prefer staying on, as you are doing, at Glenrossie,—instead of being, as you ought to be, at Clochnaben, Lorimer?'

'Well, no mother; it may be wrong, but it is not unnatural.'

'Don't smile at me in that way, sir; I hate it! You know we're all here in confusion and torment. That shameless sinner from Torrieburn, and her husband, and the drunken old miller her father, have all been up here,—actually up at the Castle, expecting to see my face, and storming loud enough to be heard round the hall, and up the turrets.'

'And did you see them?'

'I? I see that low-bred sinner with two names? Lorimer, you disgust me.'

'Really, mother, the inscription of Maggie Ross's sins on my memory——'

'Don't call her Maggie Ross, if you've any sense left of propriety!'

'Well, of Maggie Heaton's sins,—on my memory, is mossed over by Time, like an old tombstone.'

'Then you read Scripture to little purpose, "The worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched,"—that's Scripture dictum!'

'So is, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as wool," mother.'

'Lorimer, you would try the patience of a saint.'

‘Saints never have any patience—not, at least, with their neighbours and fellow-creatures—only with their martyrdoms.’

‘Will you be serious? or will you tell me at once you don’t choose to assist me when I send for you, and so take yourself off again to Glenrossie?’

‘I will be serious, mother, quite serious; but we think so differently on these topics. Maggie Ross—or Maggie Heaton—was, I believe, a girl of sixteen when Kenneth Ross chose to tempt and ruin her. I consider her, therefore, more sinned against, than sinning. She is now a woman of middle age, remarried, and to a clergyman——’

‘Clergyman, indeed! the boy’s tutor!’

‘Re-married to a gentleman who was her boy’s tutor. And, apparently, with no fault towards her present husband, except her vulgarity, which she cannot help, and which must have been just as evident (though her beauty may have excused it) when he first took her to wife. They are your neighbours, and connexions of Douglas; and I should have thought that Christian charity——’

‘Lorimer, don’t exasperate me by talking of Christian charity! Leave Christian charity to the cooks that sell and give away the dripping that don’t belong to them. Don’t preach such abominable nonsense about charity to a woman who’s as fat as a porpoise, and as bold as brass; with her hair all blowzy, and a tongue like the clack of a mill-wheel! Such a woman to dare to come here to Clochnaben! Here,—where her very existence was never acknowledged.’

‘Bless me, poor annulled and ignored Maggie! But now, my dear mother, what has she been here about? and how has she at last compelled you, by some riot you have not explained to me, to give her a hearing, and—though late in life,—at last to acknowledge her existence?’

‘I gave her *no* hearing, I tell you; except that my ears were dinned and deafened by her brawling below. And I refused to see the miller, or her husband the tutor.’

‘Then you did a very uncourteous thing. What did they come here about?’

‘They came here brawling and complaining, and saying they had made the discovery (discovery, forsooth!) that the plugged cart-wheel that was blown up under Heaton’s ridiculous ornamented window was part of a cart left on my factor’s ground, and that *he* must have had something to do with it; and that they insisted on seeing me, and having an inquiry into the whole matter.’

‘Well, that seems simple enough; and the agreeing to it ought to have satisfied them, and sent them away.’

‘Agreeing to it! I do think, of all the provoking sons that ever were born, you are the worst. Agreeing to it! I just sent the factor himself, honest man, to speak with them, and give them their answer.’

‘And he exculpated himself, of course, and denied it?’

‘Exculpate!—exculpate to that brazen sinner! He told them to go about their business, and not come flying among respectable people. He called Maggie’s father a drunken carle, and Maggie herself some name or other—a forswearing jade, I think it was—and said something about her not being married, and the conduct of the people at the Mill——’

‘Oh, mother!’

‘You may say “Oh, mother!” but I’ll tell you what it is, Lorimer, if you can’t take reasonable part with your own people, and choose to leave your mother’s house to be invaded and insulted, I’m no mother of yours; and the sooner you get back to Italy, or elsewhere, the better I shall be pleased.’

There was gloom and a sort of sorrowful contempt in Lorimer Boyd’s eyes, as he raised them to his mother’s face; who, tall and gaunt, had stood up in the angry excitement of the last sentence. ‘Mother,’ he said, ‘you desired me just now, to be serious. Will *you* be serious, and tell me clearly what these people have done, and what you want *me* to do?’

‘I want you to prevent my being subjected to such insolence.’

‘How can I prevent it? In my opinion, you should have received, at all events, Mr. Savile Heaton, courteously; assured him that the strictest inquiry should be made into the outrage of which he justly complains, even though you felt convinced no one employed by you on this estate could have had art or part in such an atrocious act; and so dismissed him. I think it was an insult to send to him the very person of whom he came to complain.’

‘Then you think precisely the contrary of what I do. I sent the factor to deny it, and there’s an end. I’m not going to interfere with any inquiry, or anything at all of the sort. They’ve made their beds, and now they may lie in them,—that’s my dictum.’

‘What bed?’

‘I’ll tell you what, Lorimer: though Clochnaben’s a poor creature and a sickly goose, he’s a better son to me than you are, with all your brains and your book-writing. You know well enough what I mean. I mean that they’ve chosen—with their new-fangled notions

of singing, and glass windows, and indecent consecration of bits of ground where parishioners lay in their proper graves before ever Mr. Heaton was thought of—to set the whole neighbourhood against them. The place is in a perfect uproar with his ways; and I'm sure I don't wonder at plugged cart-wheels, or anything else, with that Jezebel living at Torrieburn, and he preaching fancy sermons wide of the doctrine, and burying folk as if they were Roman papists.'

'Do you seriously think that, because a man preaches as an Episcopalian,—and endeavours to get a bit of unused burial-ground consecrated for the reception of the dead bodies whose occupying souls, in this life, were of his own persuasion,—it is therefore fair, right, and not to be wondered at, that an attempt should be made to blow up his house, injure his property, and, for aught the criminal can tell, destroy lives?'

'I desire you'll not call my factor a criminal.'

'Then you think it *was* your factor! Mother, it is with grief and shame I leave you; and I shall go straight to Torrieburn, and talk this over with Savile Heaton.'

'I *don't* believe it was my factor; but I don't choose you to take part with these people; and I hope the vengeance of Heaven will fall down upon them for their conduct.'

'Good God!'

'Ay, "Good God!" and He wouldn't be good if there weren't punishment for the bad; that's my dictum.'

Lorimer rose.

'Before I go,' said he, with gloomy gravity, 'I will once more put the question I ought simply to have asked at once, instead of jesting on these subjects—What do you want done; and why did you send for me?'

'I want to—to sweep these people away,' answered Lady Clochnaben, fiercely. 'I want you to desire your friend Sir Douglas to get Mr. Heaton removed to some other neighbourhood. He can do it if he chooses. He has plenty of interest; let Mr. Heaton have another living.'

'My dear mother! Do you consider that Torrieburn is Mrs. Heaton's home? Do you suppose she would consent?'

'Who asks her consent? You really are too young to be rocked in a cradle, Lorimer. Let Mr. Heaton find her a home; where he goes, she can go. That young ne'er-do-weel, Kenneth, is of age; indeed, he must now be two-and-twenty, or more. How is *he* to bring a wife (if ever he does any-

thing so decent as take one) to live with that red-haired flaunting Jezebel?’

‘Ah, mother; cease the abuse of that poor soul! It pains me always, that barking of one woman’s mouth against another; and it pains me doubly, trebly, when I hear it from my mother’s lips.’

He paused, and added hurriedly—‘Douglas took *his* wife—took Gertrude—to call at Torrieburn.’

‘Then he ought to be ashamed of himself. And *she* ought to be ashamed to hold up her head among honest women!’

‘Who?’

‘Lady Ross. I, for one, have little desire to see her, if she keeps such company.’

A short scornful laugh, followed by a sigh from the very depth of his discontented heart, was all Lorimer’s reply.

Between him and that gaunt fierce mother rose the soft blushing vision of Gertrude. Gertrude, shy, passionate, pitiful, womanly,—Gertrude, fond and loving. If ever *she* had sons, could there come a day when *her* son would feel as he did now?

Oh! mothers, and wives, and sisters, and daughters,—never let a man, connected with you by the nearest and dearest links that God can establish between His creatures, compare you with other women, and find you so wanting in all women’s best attributes, that his heart aches at the result of his comparison!

While Lorimer Boyd, lost in painful thought, slowly reached his hat and prepared to depart, the door of the dark oaken room where they sat suddenly opened, and Alice Ross appeared in the light on the threshold. She was agitated,—obviously agitated; and Lorimer, who was accustomed to all her artificial ways, looked at her now with startled curiosity.

‘What is the matter?’ said Lady Clochnaben, sharply; showing that to her, also, Alice’s manner appeared to betoken something unusual, as she stood, pale and panting, in her grey riding-habit.

‘We want help. Douglas is in the glen with a man—a man who has fainted; quite a young man; he began telling us the circumstances, but he fainted away. He has escaped from confinement in some Roman Catholic college, where the priests held him for punishment. And he was making his way south; but he has taken so little nourishment that he could not get on.’

‘There!’ said Lady Clochnaben, triumphantly, ‘*that* comes of your teachers and preachers like Mr. Heaton. Send down some of my people to the glen; and you, Lorimer, come with me. Will you take anything, Alice?’

No. Alice did not want anything for herself: but would it not be better to take some refreshment or stimulant to the man in the glen? He might be dying. He seemed very ill. She spoke with her usual drawl, but her eyes gleamed.

To the glen the whole party proceeded: and there, somewhat recovered from his fainting fit, and leaning exhausted against the bole of a tree, they found the stranger, attended by Sir Douglas. Alice's sure-footed pony was placed at his service, Alice herself mounting Sir Douglas's horse; and the rest of the group returned slowly, keeping company with the riders.

Arrived at Clochnaben, the young man, so opportunely assisted, entered into full explanation of his unfortunate position. A convert from the Roman Catholic faith, he had intended entering orders, if possible, in England; but, on returning to the college where he had been educated, he was detained, threatened, cajoled, and again menaced. He was finally put into durance, where he had remained six weeks, daily visited by the priests, and urged to return to the real fold. Escaping, during a wild stormy night, by the romantic expedient of catching hold of a branch that swung past the window of the chapel where he had been permitted to attend a midnight mass, he descended to the glen, by following the course of the rocky river which divided the lands of Clochnaben from the secluded spot where the obnoxious seminary was situated, and which indeed was little more than a substantial farm-house and outbuildings, to which a chapel and surrounding stone walls had been attached.

Six weeks of a diet approaching starvation; in confined air; tormented by exhortations and watching, and forbidden ever to recline even for an hour's rest, had so reduced him, that he was unable at length to do more than crawl into what appeared to him the vicinity of fellow-creatures. He described very graphically the dreadful mixture of hope and fear with which he beheld, high above and beyond him, the grey towers with scattered lights, standing up in the night, while he lay helpless on the earth; and the sensations produced in his mind by the slow approach of the sound of horses' feet leisurely coming onwards, till the reassuring sight of the grey habit of Alice, and the stately form of Sir Douglas, emerged into view from the woods. He desired only a day or two's hospitality till he could communicate with friends in Shropshire, who would arrange for his return to them; and in a very gentlemanlike and natural manner he thanked the persons round him earnestly for his rescue.

'I think,' said he, 'if I had not fallen in with Christian friends just when I did, I was in such a state of exhaustion that I should have succumbed to it, and you would have had to conjecture respecting the stray corpse of an apparently starved man, instead of assisting a living one.'

He smiled faintly as he spoke; and his countenance, meagre as it was with suffering, was far from unpleasing. Large dark intelligent eyes, looking larger from the extreme hollowness of his cheeks, and a costume rather in the style that is termed 'shabby genteel,' prepossessed the female portion of the group in his favour; and gaunt Lady Clochnaben condescended, after a pause, to command 'the red room' to be got ready for him; observing, with very obvious truth, that Glenrossie was a good way off, and as the young man was then in the very grounds of Clochnaben, he might just as well remain there.

Alice, Lady Clochnaben also invited to stay the night, by way of company for the stranger. Sir Douglas rode home, with the story of their morning's adventure to interest Gertrude; and Lorimer executed his intention of seeking the inmates of Torrieburn, and hearing their reasons for supposing the Clochnaben people had anything to do with the dangerous act of malice directed against the safety and comfort of Mr. Savile Heaton.

The 'red-haired Jezebel,' whose warm golden locks were still as blowzy as during her morning visit to the irate dowager, and her ample bust still heaving with hysterical remainder of past sobs, was greatly touched by the courtesy and kindness of Lorimer Boyd's manner, and the interest and sympathy he showed, in the unwarrantable attack made upon them. But, if she could have torn gaunt Lady Clochnaben to pieces with her wild white arms, she certainly would not have shown much mercy; and the extraordinary vehemence with which she kept striking her own knees, in anvil fashion, with her well-shaped hands doubled as if for boxing, half amused and half irritated Lorimer while talking to her. So did the remarks she did not scruple to make on his mother; seeming entirely to forget the relationship, and, with a confused reference to her narrow stock of books and their subjects, calling that lofty dowager 'Auld Jack the Giant-Killer,' and the

Bogle-bo o' Billy Myre,
Wha kills the bairns a'.

But a yet greater disturbance of Maggie's peace (if Maggie ever knew the word peace) was to come.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRANGER PREACHES A SERMON.

By the wide hearth in the reception-room of Clochnaben Castle—where a fire of pinewood and coal had been kindled to baffle the chill summer evening,—and where heavy woollen curtains of tartan were drawn across the deep narrow embrasures of the old-fashioned windows sunk in the stone walls,—sat, greatly comforted and much at his ease, in spite of the stiffness of shape of his high-backed chair, the hero of that adventure in the glen. Opposite to him, in two similarly high-backed chairs, sat Alice Ross and Lady Clochnaben.

The words ‘lounge’ and ‘recline’ were not in her ladyship’s vocabulary, any more than the tabooed words ‘fond’ and ‘give:’ and if, in the privacy of her lone turret-chamber at Glenrossie, Alice relapsed into cushions and softness, at all events in the Dowager’s presence she preserved that attitude which alone was considered decent or fit for a well-bred female.

She sat, then, bolt upright; her little pale hands folded in her lap, looking furtively at the stranger. Furtively, and askance.

And Lady Clochnaben also looked at him: not at all furtively, but, on the contrary, with a scrutinizing and contemplative stare; as if, having warmed and fed him, she was now merely exercising a natural right of inspection of the stray creature found on her lands.

If the young man was conscious of the double examination, he did not show it. His great luminous eyes were fixed abstractedly on the fire, wide and unwinking, as if they drank in the light. A somewhat hectic colour had succeeded his paleness and exhaustion, making his eyes seem still brighter and the cheek-bones more prominent. The mouth of that strange meagre face was its only defective feature. It was at once hard and sensual—hard, in spite of the full contour of the lips, and the submissive smile with which he answered all the questions his grim hostess was pleased to put to him. A Portuguese sort of mouth: something apish, in the form and expression of the jaw.

With respect to her questionings, Lady Clochnaben ‘*ne se gêna pas.*’ She asked whatever it came into her head to ask—his age, his parentage, his name, his tastes and occupations, his means of living, his chances of aid from relations or friends, his hopes for the future, his adventures in the past. And, though all these questions

were answered with the smoothest readiness, it was astonishing how very vague and incomplete, after all, was the impression left on the hearer's mind.

Beyond the fact that his name was James Frere, his family belonging to Shropshire, and his strongest desire on earth to become a missionary preacher, and do good in his generation—'yea, even by the extremest sacrifice,'—Lady Clochnaben could not say she had learnt anything which had not been told, without questioning, when he was recovering from his fainting fit in the glen that morning.

After a while she inquired whether he was a rapid accountant. Yes; he believed he was very quick at figures. Could he draw? Yes, he could draw in a poor way: he had not studied: he had amused himself with pen-and-ink etching now and then, and architectural sketches. Willing to utilize these gifts, the gaunt old lady informed him she desired to build an addition to the Castle towards the brow of the precipitous rock on which it was erected, and 'would be glad of any suggestion on paper' he could give as to the building, and any approximate calculation of expense: at the same time opening a blotting-book, and putting that, and pens and ink, ready for him.

Mr. James Frere did not refuse; he rose from his high-backed chair, and courteously advanced to the table, Alice had taken her work. As he passed her he slightly paused. 'What curious work,' he said: 'what is it? What a beautiful glossy material!'

'I am making nets of chenille—it is very soft,' said pussy-cat Alice: and she held one of the hanks up for examination. For an instant he touched it with his long attenuated fingers; and her eyes followed them. She drew Lady Clochnaben's attention, in a low undertone, to a remarkable scar on the back of his hand, as he sat down to his architectural task.

'You have been badly hurt some time,' said the grim hostess, pointing to the scar with little ceremony.

Mr. James Frere paused for a moment in his etching, glanced at his hand, and said quietly, 'Yes; it was a knife.'

But he volunteered no further information.

It was a knife. Was it a penance, or an attack, or what? Alice felt curious. She mused as she twisted the soft chenille; and, so musing, and seeing from under the narrowed lids of her eyes that Lady Clochnaben was also considering; and not looking her way, but sternly contemplating her own foot as it rested on the edge of the fender, she ventured a furtive examination once more of the hand and its owner.

But, just as her cautious glance had travelled from the hand to the downcast brow of the sketcher, he suddenly lifted his head ; and turning his broad, bright, intelligent gaze full on her face, met the eyes that were stealthily creeping towards him, as if he had flashed a lantern on her pale features and sandy hair ! Alice was not embarrassed. She never was embarrassed. Many a girl in her place would have blushed and laughed ; or blushed without laughing. Alice merely smiled ; a little grave odd smile, a sort of admission, — ‘ Well, I *was* looking at you : and what of that ? ’

The young stranger smiled also : and whereas, a very few minutes before, Alice had been reflecting that he would make a good study for a picture of John the Baptist in the wilderness ; it suddenly seemed to her that it was rather an insolent smile ; from a countenance anything but religious or ascetic, but, to her taste, extremely handsome.

And, as both smiles died away, Alice resumed her cautious demureness in the high-backed chair ; and the hard-set lines round Mr. Frere’s mouth seemed to deepen in intensity, as he once more bent over the writing table.

The silence which followed was broken by Lady Clochnaben.

‘ Mr. Frere,’ she said, ‘ did you ever preach ? ’

This time the readiness of answer seemed in abeyance for a few seconds. Then, in a low steady voice, he replied, ‘ Never ; I never ventured.’

‘ *Could* you preach ? ’

‘ Of course, I suppose that I could ; the grace of God assisting.’

‘ As to the grace of God, it’s “ help yourself, and heaven will help you,” —that’s my dictum. Some can preach, and some can’t, —who may be very good men for all that. But I want a man who *can* preach. I have been thinking——’ and here the dowager frowned yet more sternly at the foot planted on the fender,—‘ I have, I say, been thinking, that you might be of great use in this distracted place ; and, if you’ve any spirit, you might just drive out those that never should have been here at all. And I’ll tell you what it is, young sir : if I thought that you’d undertake it, you’re welcome to stay here, up at the Castle, as long as ever it suits ye to remain, until that desirable consummation should come about.’

This somewhat discursive and involved reasoning being further explained by the Dowager Clochnaben, it became clear to her attentive guest that what was expected of him was, so to bewitch the small world to which she would introduce him, that he should oust Mr. Savile Heaton from the hearts and ears of his already dwin-

ding congregation, and 'put him to silence' by the very simple process of leaving him without listeners in the parish.

And, in the meanwhile, the meagre and persecuted hero of the glen was to live at the Castle 'as long as it suited him;' unreclaimed by his Shropshire friends.

The hand that had that conspicuous scar on it, idly clasped and unclasped the paper-knife on the table, and balanced it lightly, while the stranger listened to these proposals.

'I will exert what poor gifts I may have, next Sabbath, if your ladyship pleases. In no church, but on the brow of this rocky hill, where I have met with such signal deliverance; and at no set time of others' preaching,—for that would be an unseemly, and, as I am at present situated, probably an unsuccessful, rivalry. But just in the interval,—when a discourse might be listened to without offence,—if your ladyship could give such notice as seems good to you, and likely to serve the end you have in view, I would do my best for the glory of my Heavenly Master, and leave the result to His mercy.'

So it was settled that Mr. Frere should preach; and the notice the grim woman gave—heightened with every detail of romance respecting the religious persecution to which he had been subjected by 'Satan and his priests,' and favoured by the ever ready curiosity of the congregations to hear 'a skrood o' the doctrine' from new lips—brought together as large a crowd as the three neighbourhoods of Glenrossie, Torrieburn, and Clochnabon, could furnish.

Nor was the success of the stranger doubtful. A voice more powerful and yet musical—more practised in its ready inflections, its tones of warning, of tenderness, of deprecation—never addressed a group of fellow-men.

As to the matter of his discourse—it was strange, ingenious, and occasionally marred by what the more educated portion of his hearers might think bad taste. Yet even that seemed a calculation, and intended to rouse attention among his poorer auditory. And he was right; images and illustrations which to the cultivated seemed absurd, to the uncultivated are often merely striking. It is astonishing how little apparent to such minds is that which we term 'the grotesque.'

There had been an expectation that he would dwell on his personal history and sufferings, and reveal the dark 'secrets of the prison-house' whence he had escaped. But no such egotistical preface ushered in his theme.

After a brief fervent allusion of thankfulness for the rescue which had made his opportunity of addressing them, he passed to his text,

which had no connecting link with such matters. It was, 'Could ye not watch with me one hour?' And nothing could be more pathetic or impressive than his appeal to 'the hearts that fall asleep,' to wake, bestir themselves, and devote their energies in good time to God; nothing more appalling than the picture he drew of 'the time to come,' when it should be 'too late' for energy; 'too late' for repentance; when the sluggish heart might 'sleep on and take its rest,'—God and good angels departing from it for ever!

The divergence from his actual argument was in the occasion he took, to lay stress on the scene in which this text of warning had first been given. *In the garden*—the garden where Christ habitually walked with His disciples; and from thence he lectured discursively and vehemently in favour of open-air meetings, and hill-preachings, and against all 'inclosed and decorated places,' and 'idolatrous temples and such like,'—as sinful and offensive. He said, Christ who had taught in the Temple, was yet remembered best by the 'Sermon on the Mount,' and the 'Agony in the Garden,' that He had preached 'on the pathless shore, and on the rolling waves of the ever-restless sea, and in the sandy and unproductive desert, where the very bread and fishes that were to sustain life in His hearers had to be miraculously multiplied—so far away were they from human habitation and the help of man's work.' Yea, he said, 'the very law of God Himself was given to Moses on the bare mountain—"and out of a bush—out of a bush—He spake in His thunders!"'

And so, argued the strange preacher, the gardens, and the wilds, and the bushes, and the hills, and the great grey old olive-trees, and the palms whose gathered branches were scattered under Christ's feet, were dearer to God than any work or carving of man's hand, and more acceptable than all the painted playthings of his skill. And the use of such decorated and covered places as were now the sinful fashion, was calculated to corrupt the spiritual meaning of adoration; to teach men to pray only when they could do so softly and conveniently; to encourage mincing women in rich clothing to attend merely when it was not too cold, or too wet, or too windy, in their opinion, for indolent homage to their Maker.

And then suddenly, as it were, carried away by his subject, he burst forth in a sort of rapture about 'prayers and burials at sea;' and souls accepted 'even on the blood-stained herbage of the battle field;' and from the graphic image of sailors in an open boat at midnight, drifting away from the burning ship without food or compass, 'relying on the Lord,' he passed to the historic tradition of

the night-service read by one army while the other was carousing, and the victory that followed. Winding up all with a word-picture as vivid as ever was painted, of a dying soldier left by unconscious comrades among a scattered heap of the moon-lighted slain, and saying his final prayer to God alone and unattended; 'needing no temple but the starry vault of heaven opened to his upturned eyes;' and after the great din of war and the thrill of the trumpet, hearing no music but the wind sighing through the darkened trees—'that plaintive monotone in the great hymn of life which for ever, and till this world shall shrivel like a scroll, goeth up from all things created to the Creator of all.'

And with this image, and these words, the musical and resounding voice died down into silence, and there was a slow dispersion of the crowd: young men and maidens, old men and crones, going dreamily away; children looking timidly about, as though Moses lived in those surrounding tufts of broom and heather; men in folded plaids and Hieland bonnets, pronouncing it a 'varry grand discoorse,' and Lady Clochnaben, with a grim triumphant smile, standing still by the preacher's side, but not looking at him—looking rather towards her son Lorimer, who had passed his arm through that of Sir Douglas preparatory to departure—and to the sinner of Torrieburn, who had not only dared to listen to a religious 'discoorse,' but was now actually giving her opinion on it, in that loud jaunty manner which she adopted to show her independence.

And Maggie's opinion was, that there were 'ow'r muckle words for folk to follow,' and that Mr. Frere was, to her thinking, 'like the pail o' milk gotten frae Leddy Grace, ane o' the black kye; that just aye frothit, and brimmit ow'r. And sac, my mon, dinna ye be dooncast, for your Sabbath discoorses are no that wearyfu', though whiles they mak' me a bit sleepy;' and she laid her large comely hand on Savile Heaton's shoulder as she spoke.

And in token of consciousness of the light burden thus imposed, Mr. Heaton put his own hand over Maggie's—not indeed as returning the ill-timed caress, but rather as a hand is laid on the head of a favourite dog, to keep it still while the owner is conversing with friends; and he then addressed himself to Mr. Boyd.

CHAPTER XXVI.

KITH-AND-KIN LOVE.

‘I CANNOT help thinking it improbable,’ said Mr. Heaton diffidently, —while still suppressing Maggie’s hand—‘that this is Mr. Frere’s first preaching. He has much eloquence—and—and much courage.’

‘I entirely agree with you, Mr. Heaton;’ answered Lorimer, ‘it is even *impossible*, in my opinion. The man is a very practised speaker; and I am tolerably sure that I have heard him before, years ago,—somewhere abroad, though I cannot clearly call to mind where and when. I think he must be an Irishman. The style he has adopted, and his whole appearance, favour that supposition. I never heard a voice that ran up and down the gamut in that way, that was not Irish, nor ever heard the same fluency in men of any other nation.’

‘You must be mistaken, Mr. Boyd,’ said the voice of Alice Ross. ‘He told us himself that he was of a Shropshire family, and he is too young to have preached anywhere years ago, for he has not yet attained to his twenty-fifth birthday.’

The deliberate drawl with which Miss Ross always spoke, was not quickened by any emotion in this little defence. On the contrary, there was something peculiarly slow and tight in her utterance of these sentences, as though she were strangling Lorimer’s opinion in its cradle. But sharp gleams of indignation came from her eyes, like the electric sparks from Grimalkin’s fur; brilliant and equally evanescent.

‘Is Sister Ailie charmed with the new preacher?’ said Sir Douglas, smiling. ‘He is just the sort of man to hit a lady’s fancy. But, indeed,’ added he, earnestly, ‘I do wrong to utter a light word on the subject. He is a very remarkable young man, *very* remarkable; and I cannot doubt but that his best hopes will be fulfilled, and that he will, indeed, be most useful in his generation! Suffering is a good school. No one can look at him and not see that he has suffered much. I long to do him a kindness, if it were at all in my power. I hope to see much of him. It is not often one meets with such a man. As to Lorimer’s idea of having seen him before, fancies of that sort come to us all; and about his age, with those beardless men it is very difficult to calculate; they constantly

look either very much younger or very much older than they are. Take my arm, Ailie; you seem tired.'

And, while Savile Heaton and Lorimer walked on in front, talking eagerly together, Alice and stately Sir Douglas followed: sitting down now and then on the banks of heather, that Alice's fatigue might not be increased. Resting in the open air; far sweeter rest than ever is found on silken couch or cushioned *fauteuil*; the small streamlet bubbling and trickling down the hill, laughing its silver laugh amid the stones; and that, and the 'sough' amid the incense-breathing pines, making indeed a sweet chord in that hymn,—which Mr. James Frere had impressed most deeply on Miss Ross's memory.

And it was during this walk with her half-brother, that Alice held with him a remarkable conversation—one that he could not forget; one which in after times the curl of a fern leaf, or the notes of the thrush's song, or the sight of a harebell among long dry grass,—in short, the most trivial accidental things—would bring back to him as if her words were but just spoken, and her pale irregular profile were still between him and the evening sky.

For it was not often that Alice and Sir Douglas held long *tête-à-tête* colloquies. He was a busy landlord; an attached husband; a companionable friend to his male associates; a tolerably studious reader, though no bookworm. He had neither the time, —nor, if truth is to be spoken, the thought,—to bestow on her.

And 'Ailie' knew it. She knew she was the last and the least of his thoughts, kindly as he was; and therefore she made the most of her rare opportunities when she got them.

I wonder if women who are 'first objects' in some large and happy home circle,—or even 'first objects' to the objects they themselves love,—ever ruminate over the condition of one who is *nobody's* first object. How lone in the midst of company such a one must feel! What silence must lie under all their talking and laughing! What strange disruption from the linked chain that holds all the rest together! What exile, though ever present! What starvation of soul, in the midst of all those great shares of love meted out around her!

Ailie was not social by nature; nor loving; nor yearning for love: but she was conscious of loneliness, and resented the pain.

With a skill of which she only had the mastery, she led, little by little, back to that implication of being 'charmed' by James Frere, which her half-brother had lightly passed over fearing to wound even by that gentle jest.

You could never know how Ailie managed this sort of thing. She had some private Ariadne's clue, by means of which, if she wished to escape from discussion of a subject, pursue it as you would, she was out through the labyrinth where you remained, and free in space.

If, on the other hand, *you* desired to avoid touching some topic of risk and discomfort, it was in vain you retreated from it. Through the intricate passages of thought, into your very heart of hearts came Ailie and her clue, and sat down victor over your intended privacy. How she crept back, softly and soundlessly, along the parapet, and up the roof, and in at the window of Sir Douglas's thoughts, and recommenced a little discussion and defence, respecting the possibility of her being 'charmed' by one 'so much a stranger' as Mr. James Feroe, the warm-hearted soldier could not have told; but he remembered for ever the singular wind-up of Ailie's denials of such a possibility.

'Not only,' she said, 'I do not think that I should be easily charmed by a stranger (and after all, lone as my life has been, I have, of course, had my opportunities, and can test myself in *that*); but I am just incapable of conceiving those romantic loves and nonsenses that I read of in books, and hear of; and they just go by like a false dream! It well may be *because* I have been so lonely, but to my thinking there can be no love, no tie, like love and tie of kith and kin.

'Do *you* not think'—and here she turned slowly round, and looked up wistfully in her half-brother's face—'do you not think that, where there is to the making of us the very same flesh and blood and spirit, the tie must be stronger for love? stronger than mere fancy, or even approval, or attachment, that way that the books put it? For love may change (and we read *that* too), and it may prove false (and there's many an old ballad to *that*), and it is a jealous restless thing, by what I can make out (and I declare I often think of it when I try to please Lady Ross, and try to imagine if I should object even to a sister being too much to a man that was all in all to *me*): but in kith-and-kin love there need be none of all that. Kith-and-kin love is *sure*. You can't change from being the same flesh and blood; and though, of course, I've heard of sister and brother's quarrels and coldness, I think surely it never could last,—to part them as common love does; and I think, if I had had an own brother, as I have only a half-brother'—she spoke it with a most plaintive drawl—'I think, indeed I am perfectly positive, I should have loved *that* brother better than any man that crossed my path of life, let that man be what he might. For oh! dear, you'll never know how much I've thought, even about *you*, and

wondered if ever you'd come home to stay, and what kith-and-kin love would be like, for me! Many a day, in the little turret room, I've looked to it, and perhaps foolishly; for God made me but an insignificant creature, and you'd need a sister with more fire and strength in her, before she could be much to you! But, still, I'll not be easily "charmed" away, Douglas, and that you'll find.'

The tone was so grave and sad; the slender form sat so stiff and still; the eyes, though wistful, were so without the expectation or possibility of tears; it was all so unlike either girlish sentimentality or passionate woman's *épanchement*, that it was difficult to know how to take, or how to answer it.

Difficult, at least, to Sir Douglas.

And as the echo of all she said, rolled after the spoken sentences from his ear into his easy heart; he thought with what touching innocence his poor lonely half-sister spoke of love, and being charmed, as a thing she had heard of, read of, sung old ballads about, but of which she had no personal experience,—how her one sole notion was 'kith-and-kin love,' which was to her all in all;—and he was greatly moved.

He folded Alice in his arms as they rose to continue their walk homewards; and then he said,—'My dear little woman, my poor Ailie, the natural life of your sex is to be all in all to some true mate, and not to depend altogether on what you call "kith-and-kin" love:—but of this be quite sure, that you shall always find in me the love of an own brother, not of a half-brother; you shall tell me your joys and sorrows, and thoughts and feelings, as you have done this day; and when you *are* "charmed" (as I can't help hoping for you, some day, Ailie), I'll love that man, if he is worthy of you and treats you tenderly as your sweet nature requires to be treated, as if he also was my born brother, and nearer my own soul than any one except my Kenneth of old boyish days.'

And so they walked home,—very silent, both of them. Only, when they came in sight of the turrets of Glenrossie, Sir Douglas pointed up to her little nook with a kindly smile, and, pressing her slender passive hands in his own, said,—'You will never feel so lonely there again, will you? You will know some of my thoughts are always with you.'

And when Ailie had lightly ascended that stair, and curled herself softly round in her *causeuse* (that chair so little resembling the prevailing pattern at Clochnaben), and flung round her shoulders an eider-down tippet to prevent taking cold after her walk, she felt—

That she had had a successful day's mousing!

CHAPTER XXVII.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.

HONEST Sir Douglas went straight to his wife's apartment—a sunny sitting-room, still farther illumined for him by the smile of intense love and welcome which he knew he should meet whenever he opened the door. It had been furnished very gaily, and in somewhat foreign taste, in pursuance of orders sent to Glenrosie before the bride's arrival. Gertrude and he had talked together of the gloomy grandeur of some of the Scotch castles; the naked, barren, well-to-do-ish appearance given by slated roofs and stone walls in meaner Scotch abodes; and the hungry, positive, prosaic, gardenless rows of small houses, that could not be called 'cottages' in Scotch villages, that looked like pieces of uncomfortable towns carted out into the country. They had laughed together as they sat among the orange-trees and roses of the Villa Mandorlo at Naples, over his warnings and hopes that Gertrude would refrain and command herself, and not behave like Mary Queen of Scots, who is said to have burst into tears on arriving at the grim gates of Holyrood, whither a group of unkempt Shetland ponies had conveyed her and her attendant ladies.

Gertrude loved her rough hill-pony, and her Scotch castle, and all things in Scotland. There was music for her in the very accent of its warm-hearted and energetic people. Nor did she greatly care for the pomps and vanities of life. But, nevertheless, she was glad of her beautiful morning-room. It was not its luxury that she enjoyed, so much as its brightness and the dear knowledge of all the tender forethought its little details had proved. She never entered it without recollecting the glow of pleasure on her husband's handsome countenance at her amazement and joy when he ushered her into it the morning after her arrival. She saw it still, that vanished morning's light! The opening door—the unexpected loveliness—and his face, the face of her beloved, when, turning upon the irradiated *tout ensemble*—pale-green Aubusson carpets and curtains, wreathed with roses; glittering tables where stood crystal flower-vases, enamelled with his crest and her name; great golden herons with silver fish in their beaks, making candelabra-stands almost as tall as herself; and a crowd of minor objects, every one a thought of love:—turning from all these, she thanked him with almost childish

exclamations of delight ; repeated with clasped hands, and again repeated more gravely, with deeper emotions of gratitude. She loved that happy room !

And Sir Douglas loved it too, and stood at its threshold now, welcomed by the smile he knew so well, and which he thought the most lovely upon earth. For in nothing is there such a difference. There are women who smile only with their lips ; and there are others whose eyes, and brow, and lips beam all together with such a cordial glow of brightness, that it is difficult to believe an extra gleam of light does not fall at such times even upon their burnished hair.

That was the sort of smile Gertrude gave,—tinged with a certain lingering shyness, in spite of security and familiarity of love. In natures like hers, intense love is always timid.

Sir Douglas talked with her, and asked tenderly of her health, for she had not been able to accompany them that afternoon ; and then he spoke of ‘ Ailie,’ and earnestly pressed on Gertrude his own views of his half-sister’s character and feelings,—repeating, with a colour taken from his own warm heart, the impression of her innocence, her reserve, her lonely yearnings for kindred.

‘ She requires, you see, my own Gertrude, to be drawn out ; to be encouraged ; in fact, to be petted and made much of. I was much moved by what she said to-day—she so seldom speaks of herself and her feelings. They are acute, rely upon it ; but she never had companions,—never had anyone to confide in. I am sure, if you once grow to be fond of her, you would possess her utmost love and confidence. She is diffident as to her power of attracting, and very young of her age : it seems quite the heart of a young girl, though she has so much informantion and womanly sense. *Pet* her a little, Gertrude ; pet her, my own dear wife !’

And as the dressing-bell rang through the last words, Sir Douglas rose and left the beautiful room, and the sweet surprised face, and departed to his own chamber.

Lady Ross did not immediately betake herself to her toilette ; though she was conscious of the vista (through another door that opened as the dressing-bell rang) of her maid moving in front of the looking-glass, and of a pale peach-coloured silk hanging up ready to put on,—a dress with which she always wore a necklace of a single row of Scotch pearls given by Sir Douglas.

She did not begin to dress. She sat looking rather abstractedly, at all the objects in her beautiful morning-room, from which the rich

twilight was now rapidly departing.—for even *that* room, of course, must have its night and its hours of darkness.

‘Pet Alice!’

Again and again she thought the words over; and the eager, tender manner of Sir Douglas while urging it.

‘Pet Alice!’ The young wife strove to drive away little stinging haunting memories of coldness, and slyness, and hardness, and alien ways, which had seemed to her to be component parts of her sister-in-law’s character. Something very like a shudder thrilled through Gertrude. Was he wrong? Could Douglas be wrong? Or had she herself been harsh in judgment? *Could* she judge well and wisely of a person who from childhood had been denied, what she herself from childhood had enjoyed—tenderness, freedom of affection, frank and fearless expression of all passing thoughts? Lorimer Boyd, it was true, thought ill of Alice. He had said she was ‘a creature full of harm.’ But Lorimer was cynical. Yes; loveable in himself; a true and faithful friend; but cynical in his judgments of others. And not happy in his home relations. What a mother! What a brother! Enough to sour any man’s judgments.

‘Pet Alice!’ What was the use of arguing about that, in her own mind? Ought it not to be enough for her that *Douglas wished it*? If he brought her a toad, and begged her to keep it in her room and make a plaything of it, would she not do it? What had Alice’s deserts to do with the matter? Douglas wished his sister to be petted—DOUGLAS wished it!

And with that last thought Gertrude started up, and passed quickly into the inner-dressing room, where the maid and the peach-coloured gown were waiting; and had her hair coiled round very simply (there being such abridged dressing time), and clasped the collar of pearls round her white throat, just as Sir Douglas came to accompany her downstairs.

Alice was already there; and Lorimer; and Mr. Savile Heaton, who had remained to dine.

And even in the few minutes that intervened, before the grey-headed old butler announced dinner, Gertrude began her ‘petting’ of Alice. She glided towards her with a kindly smile, and asked if she had liked her walk—if she had liked the preaching of Mr. Frere,—if she had been tired in the long ramble home? And, while her frank soft eyes questioned with her tongue, Alice gave a sidelong, calculating glance; at Lady Ross’s shoulder, at her necklace, at the graceful folds of her gown,—anywhere but directly in her face.

'She looked askance at Christabel,—
Jesu Maria shield her well!'

And while she looked askance, she calculated ; and with so much quickness and intelligence did she sum up all, that only in the passing down the broad oaken stair to the stately dining-room she found time to say to her half-brother, on whose arm she went in to dinner—

'I am sure you have been speaking of me to Lady Ross ; her manner is so very, *very* much kinder to me than usual, even when we are all comfortable together. But do not try to *make* people kind to me. I am quite pleased and contented. Perhaps it might even offend. I should not like to seem troublesome.'

And then she sat down in the usual place, between Douglas and Lorimer : her thin, still mouth looking as if silence was habitual to it. Only when Lady Ross tried to talk a little more to her than usual, and more gaily and familiarly, she allowed a sort of imperceptible shade of vexation and embarrassment to gather round it before she replied ; and once, only once, she looked at Sir Douglas with a little vague dry smile, and shrug of the shoulders, as much as to say, 'This is your doing : I cannot help myself. I hope it will not make me a burden, or make them dislike me.'

But Sir Douglas's thoughts were much preoccupied. He was considering about his friend Lorimer : he had fallen back on the idea that *there* was the natural suitable destiny for Alice, and for Boyd ! His friend could not want a very young wife ; such a one would not suit him. (It is astonishing how much more clearly this sort of conviction of mature age comes in judging one's neighbour's destiny than judging of one's own.) Alice was very sensible—rather original—just the thing. And Lorimer was sure to be Earl of Clochnaben some day, and they would all be neighbours, and friends, and brothers ! It was a most glorious castle in the air—the fit and appropriate end of all.

But, alas ! how recalcitrant is man—above all when friends (or foes) desire to bestow him in wedlock.

How often does one see, some beautiful married woman the object of a compromising adoration which she does not share—which she would give her alternate eyelashes to be rid of—for which she is bullied and anathematised by the mother, sisters, and cousins of her adorer, to say nothing of some girl or girls who wish to wed him ; and yet there is no bringing him 'to a sense of his situation !'

How often does one see, like the obstinate pursuit and courtship of some young damsel, who, to use a familiar phrase of scorn,

'wouldn't so much as look at' the suitor; while some other young damsel is sighing her heart out for him, and folding up as a secret treasure a shabby little withered sprig he gave her one evening while handing her through a quadrille. And he won't—no he *won't*—see what good is for him; but, in the case of the married idol, persists in breaking his heart for glimpses of a person who don't want to see him at all; and, in the case of the young damsel, in resolutely wooing one who cannot be persuaded to wed him!

All, apparently, out of sheer contradiction; as though marriageable man resembled the Connaught pig, of whom the Irishman said he was obliged to pretend he wanted him to go to Cork in order to make him take the road to Dublin! Sir Douglas certainly seemed to think there was a Connaught piggishness of obstinate avoidance of the right path in 'dear old Lorimer.'

He could not go up to the man, take him by the button, and advise him, point-blank, to marry his sister; but all that could be done, in a decent, gentlemanly way, he was willing and anxious to do, and persuade Gertrude to do also.

Poor Gertrude! How was she to explain to him that Alice was rather an object of aversion than otherwise to Mr. Boyd? That he thought her 'a creature full of harm?'

After dinner, too, how provokingly absorbed was Lorimer in some discussion with Mr. Savile Heaton: who was not a clever man; who was generally a shy and silent man; and who was now—as it were out of positive ill-luck and thwarting of Sir Douglas's secret wishes—carrying on what seemed to be an earnest, continuous argument, to which Lorimer gave the most assiduous attention; and, indeed, ended by taking out a note-book, asking for 'Cruden's Concordance,' and making memoranda which he handed to Mr. Heaton.

And then, flinging aside the heavy crimson silk curtains of the window, he looked out steadily and absently at the star-lit heaven and the lake far away, as though the text he had sought for in Cruden had been those words of mystery,—'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?'

He had not even seemed to notice (except by a mechanical and courteous inclination of the head) that it was Alice who brought the 'Concordance,' and laid it on the table where the two gentlemen were seated; though Sir Douglas 'improved the opportunity,' by saying, 'Oh! Alice knows where every book in the library is to be found; I believe she could select them in the dark.'

When asked if he would not take coffee, he declined, without lifting his eyes from the page; and the tea-table was deserted except by the two ladies, between whom conversation became fitful and disjointed. The more caressing Gertrude endeavoured to be, the more dry and curt did Alice become; till, at one point of their discoursing, she looked at Lady Ross with such an expression of covert ridicule, that the startled hostess blushed, and ceased to speak. In another second, the pallid face of Alice was so placid, so 'without form and void,' that Gertrude thought she must have been in a waking dream to imagine her previous look had meant anything.

She felt ill and weary, and feverish with the feverishness of one who has gone through that uphill task, *trying* to be pleasant and companionable to a companion unwelcome and ungenial. But she did not like to give the signal for retiring. Douglas might think it shortened the evening for Alice.

At length Lorimer Boyd returned from his reading of the stars, and, advancing into the room, actually seated himself by the side of Alice Ross, and entered into conversation with her; principally, as was but natural, on the subject of Mr. James Frere's preaching, his adventures, and his account of himself.

'Well,' said Lorimer, carelessly, 'no one can deny that he has what my countrymen familiarly call "the gift o' the gab," and I hope he may always make a good use of it. One advantage he certainly has: the most melodious voice I think I ever heard. That is a perfection quite independent of eloquence.'

Gertrude looked suddenly up from her work, and smiled tenderly at the speaker. She was thinking that he himself possessed the advantage he was praising in another, and how often she had heard the sweet even tones reading aloud to amuse her dying father.

Her look was full of fondness, and Alice saw it; and saw the gloom deepen instead of lessen in Lorimer's countenance when she spoke out her thought and said, as the tender smile died away, 'Do you remember how my dear father loved to hear you read on that account?'

'Yes,' said Sir Douglas, 'I remember, even as a boy, thinking Lorimer's the pleasantest voice in the world.'

'I will immediately learn to sing,' said Mr. Boyd, with a forced smile; 'and have a "Maitre Corbeau" adventure. But, meanwhile,' added he, abruptly, 'our friend, Mr. Heaton, is going to exert his voice. We have been agreeing that he shall endeavour to raise a collection for the schools near Torrieburn, which are sadly

in want of funds ; and I hope all that has occurred will not prevent a good attendance and a good collection, and that Mr. James Frere may not utterly monopolize the attention of the inhabitants of these regions, though there seems some danger of his doing so.'

If Gertrude's smile was singularly bright and sweet, Lorimer's was not. It was a smile that made you wince and look grave ; and Alice did not like its expression on the present occasion.

'I shall certainly be present at Mr. Heaton's discourse,' she said, 'with my brother and Lady Ross.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. SAVILE HEATON ALSO PREACHES.

MR. SAVILE HEATON had not the natural advantages which distinguished Mr. Frere. His voice was rather weak, and an occasional hesitation, which was not exactly a stammer, induced a repetition of words just pronounced, as if he had not been satisfied with the way in which they were delivered : and sometimes gave that appearance of confusion which may be observed when a person reading aloud loses his place on the page.

But on this occasion he was more fluent than usual ; and even Maggie half refrained from her customary slumbers, and shifted her large ignorant blue eyes with a certain complacency from one to another of the immediate auditors, as though ascertaining what effect her 'mon's' discourse had on their minds.

It was a very simple straightforward sermon, after all ; with now and then a gleam of eloquence, and now and then an unexpected metaphor, and always a glow of real earnestness about it : on the hackneyed text, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,'—illustrated with the obvious lines of argument as to the various motives for 'giving in charity,' as it is called ; the ambition to be thought well of by men,—the superstitious hope to atone by good works for evil deeds, as of old great robbers built fine churches : on which principle Milan Cathedral is traditionally said to have been founded ; being begun by a penitent nephew, in memory of an esteemed uncle *whom he had murdered*. He touched also on the 'shame-faced giving,' because our neighbours give : the customary

giving,—as one drops a piece of money into a church-plate ; and so forth.

Nor did Mr. Savile Heaton become particularly impressive till rather more than half way on in his discourse ; when he dwelt on the secret motives, and even wicked motives, which may produce apparently good actions ; and in that part of his sermon his nervous hesitation seemed to leave him, and he spoke with more boldness and more eloquence of language than usual ; the faces of his listeners being still noted in a sort of careless way by Maggie—while she occasionally broke the tedium of the time by irreverently and surreptitiously cracking green hazel-nuts with her fine white teeth, and eating them.

And those faces would have made a good study for a painter. The warm approval, the sympathy with all that was true and earnest, in the countenance of Old Sir Douglas ; the serene, attentive, angelic brow and eyes of his young wife ; Lorimer, with folded arms and set compressed mouth, looking apparently only at the uninteresting straw hassock at his feet ; Alice, demure, and yet restless, furtively blinking from time to time side glances at the preacher ; and Mr. James Frere (for he also attended, though his patroness at the Castle had tossed her head in scorn at the proposal) with his dark bright eyes fixed on Savile Heaton, rather with an expression of curiosity to learn how this inferior man would handle the matter, than with any reference to the matter itself ; but all attention to his words.

Then it was—as the speaker dwelt on the power of God, ‘to whom all hearts be open, all desires known,’ to sift and discern the variety of motives that may produce one common result,—when he warned his hearers in the language of Scripture that ‘there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known ;’ that ‘whatsoever has been spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light,—and that which was whispered in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops ;’—with all argument pertaining to those solemn texts, and withering denunciations of the pharisaical hypocrisy which deludes man, but never can delude God ;—then it was, as I have said, that this shy and common-place minister became extremely impressive ; and spoke indeed so forcibly and so well, that an electric thrill seemed to go through his small congregation, both among the learned and the unlearned.

Alice Ross sat stiller than ever ; but her glance wandered from Heaton to Sir Douglas, and back again with sidelong skill, to others of the group : while Mr. Frere’s eyes were withdrawn from the

preacher, though the expression of attention and curiosity even deepened in his face. He seemed to be resolving some problem in his mind. Suddenly his fine eye flashed upwards again, and turned—not on Heaton, but on Lorimer Boyd!

Their eyes met. Lorimer seemed to have been observing him. Some ripple of movement, which did not even amount to one of Mr. Boyd's 'grim smiles,' flickered round his mouth: and some of that inexplicable shrinking, which is visible in the human eye even when its gaze is not withdrawn—in moments of fear, suspicion, or conscious duplicity—contracted for a second or two the bright, bold, clever orbs which had 'charmed' Miss Alice Ross. Then another expression passed into them. Not of fear; of defiance; of hard resolution; an accordance for the moment of the eyes with the hard, resolute, animal mouth: and then Mr. James Frere's countenance became, as before, simply attentive, and watchful of the preacher's closing words.

But there had been, in that short moment, between those two men, that strange spiritual communication which all of us who have any experience of life, know so well. Mr. Frere became aware that Mr. Boyd distrusted him; and Mr. Boyd, that he and his distrust were alike defied, and set at naught by the eloquent stranger.

Nor did it need such sealing of the conviction in Mr. Frere's mind that Lorimer had 'something to do with the sermon,'—as was naturally produced by overhearing Mr. Savile Heaton, on their walk homewards, answer Sir Douglas's kindly congratulations on the excellence of that discourse, by the modest and deprecatory reply,—'Well, I had the advantage of talking the subject over with Mr. Boyd: indeed, of reading the sermon to him, and receiving some valuable suggestions. He is a very superior man: a great scholar: a most cultivated mind: I feel greatly indebted to him for the interest he has shown in my plans and my school; and I consider my composition, such as it was, much benefited by his remarks.'

When Mr. James Frere heard this modest reply to Sir Douglas's compliments, he was walking immediately behind the group; side by side with Miss Alice Ross. Involuntarily he turned to her, to see how she 'took' the answer so made, and perhaps to make some disparaging comment on Mr. Boyd's interference, by way of guarding his own interests in that quarter. He met Alice's glance as he had previously met Lorimer's; and received much the same degree of enlightenment from it, though of a more satisfactory kind.

He decided it was quite unnecessary to make any observation. He therefore merely sighed, and, casting his eyes wistfully over the hills

and intervening scenery, he said, 'I would I were away from this place! I must think of leaving Clochnaben.'

And Alice Ross did not say in any foolish tender way, 'Pray don't leave us,' or 'Oh, I should be so sorry;' but, with a little hard short laugh, and slow drawling utterance, she said, 'You are easily beaten, Mr. Frere.'

And Mr. Frere, though he had some experience of the sex, was just sufficiently startled to pause before he said:—

'No; I am *not* easily beaten, Alice Ross.'

Whether she noticed his calling her by her Christian name, and approved or disapproved the liberty so taken, could not be guessed from outward evidence. She certainly approved the sentiment,—if the smile of odd sinister triumph that left her small thin mouth spoke true; and she made no attempt to withdraw from his companionship and join some one else in the walking party.

Nay, when Mr. Frere turned back after escorting her, and shook hands with Sir Douglas,—and lamented that he could not stay to dinner, but must return to the Dowager Clochnaben,—he saw, with great satisfaction, that pussy-cat Alice had glided out of the party at the castle door, and was standing alone and *en cachette* against a mass of thick laurels, watching him as he walked away.

If Mr. Frere had been a common-place gentleman, he might have stopped and waved his hand perhaps in token of farewell, and of his consciousness that she was thus occupied. But he knew better. Not Isaac, when he went forth to meditate in the fields at eventide, could seem more utterly unconscious of observation. Only, when he reached the vantage ground of a slight ascent which prefaced the more rugged climb to come, he paused at that knoll; and, lifting his hat, not in token of salutation, but as relieving himself of a formal encumbrance, stood and gazed at the red sky of evening and the picturesque scenery, believing (not in vain) that those shrewd grey eyes were still fixed upon him; and that he himself appeared to the full as picturesque as any other object within their ken.

CHAPTER XXIX.

KENNETH AGAIN!

BUT Mr. Savile Heaton was not destined to enlighten his congregation with another sermon distilled through the alembic of Lorimer Boyd's mind. At Torrioburn, and at Glenrossie also, that Sunday evening, all was perplexity and alarm. News,—bad news,—had come of Kenneth! Not this time of his conduct, or his debts, or anything which friends might remedy. No; but Kenneth lay ill of fever,—dying, some of the doctors thought,—at San Sebastian, which port he had reached, intending to return from Spain through France.

A brief and rather incoherent letter, dictated to some woman, partly by Kenneth and partly by Giuseppe, narrated the circumstances; how, having had a burning fever, he had apparently recovered, but now it was a low nervous fever, and the young Signore could not lift his hands to his head for weakness.

'And, indeed, it is now more than eight days,' so ran poor Giuseppe's letter, 'that his young Excellency has not sworn, nor shown any symptoms of his usual animation; and my mind is at sea, and *mi crepa il cuore*: it breaks my heart; for, could I hear the well-beloved Excellency call me a dog,—or find some fault,—I would revive; and, alas, it was only yesterday, it was my hope that he was about to throw at me the cup of lemonade (which he relished not, finding it bitter), for his eyes showed much anger; but with grief, I say, it passed, and he only set the cup on one side. And that same evening, my limbs all trembled, for he called and said—"Giuseppe! death is coming; tell my uncle to forgive everything, as I do." And with a great sigh his young Excellency sank in a swoon. Now, if some friend will come to his Excellency, it will be good. Not for weariness for I am strong, and will nurse the Signore as a child; but for cheering by words in the English tongue, and to understand well whether he should live or die; and if he die, to say what shall be done.

'And with much misery I recommend myself to all saints of mercy—as also I commend to God and His goodness your most noble Excellency, and the young Excellency who is dying, and all the good family.

'I am, your most devoted and most humble, 'GIUSEPPE.'

In a hand nearly illegible, but evidently scrawled by Kenneth, was added,—‘Tell my mother I think of her and Torrieburn.’

Little had he written, poor Kenneth! to that mother, or his uncle, or any one else during his wanderings. ‘*Au jour, le jour*,’ was his motto, and the careless enjoyment of passing hours his sole object in life. Now life was trembling in the balance, and this moan from a foreign land came, like a sick child’s cry at midnight, to startle them all.

Who should go to Kenneth?

Sir Douglas could not. Dearly as he loved this Absalom, he had holier and closer ties that held him back. His young wife was ailing, was soon to be a mother; his place was with her, not with Kenneth. Lorimer would have been willing enough, but would he, could he, be welcome to that young, unjust, irritable mind? It was settled that Savile Heaton should go. He had been Kenneth’s tutor; he was his stepfather; and though the rebellion and ingratitude of boyhood and adolescence had been his sole return for much kindness, and the bitter speech had once been flung at him in one of Kenneth’s rages,—‘*Your care of me! Who thanks you? You were paid for your care of me, such as it was,*’—still, the gentle nature of the man, and his desire to do his best for Maggie’s son had upborne him through much insult and folly; and they had not been on bad terms during the latter years of Kenneth’s youth, nor had Kenneth been much at home, either to provoke, or be provoked by, unwelcome communion.

Savile Heaton was to go, then; and alone. As to being accompanied by his wife, it was not to be thought of for a moment. Maggie raving and sobbing by a sick bed, where, of all things, quiet was most desirable; Maggie struggling to explain herself in broad Scotch among foreigners, to whom even English was barely comprehensible; Maggie travelling and living in foreign hotels, who had never stirred from Torrieburn;—it was simply an impossibility.

Luckily it never appeared to that wilful female in any other light. She shrieked and sobbed over Kenneth’s state, incessantly, during the two or three hours of preparation that intervened between the receipt of the ill tidings and her husband’s departure; but she never thought of pleading to go with him. She rocked herself to and fro in spasmodic sobbings, and left the packing and arranging of his scanty comforts to the yet more ignorant servant lassie. She repeatedly told him he would be killed and eaten ‘amang they outlandish men,’ and then, starting to her feet, urged

him to begone, and reproached him for slowness, 'while, maybe, Kenneth lay deeing.'

When at length he attempted to bid her farewell and start, she clung to him as if she had never intended him to leave her; and, as the dog-cart rapidly drove away, above the sound of its wheels came the sharp successive cries of her distress. Nor did her mood alter, until,—provoked by the efforts of the poor awkward servant to console and quiet her, and persuade her to 'leave greeting and step ben, like a dear leddie,'—she suddenly turned and administered to her would-be sympathiser a most sound and vigorous box on the ear. The girl retreated 'ben' into the house, and Maggie's renewed howling was only put a stop to, as usual, by sheer bodily exhaustion.

By the time her father, the miller—to whom her mother had gone to communicate the 'awfu' tidins'—arrived at Torrieburn House, Maggie was quiet enough; and the three sat down in the parlour to a bowl of extremely stiff whisky toddy. The 'auld wife' retained sufficient discretion to drag her daughter upstairs after a while, and put her to bed before she herself retired to rest; but the miller was still asleep on the horse-hair sofa, with all his clothes on, when the morning shone with fullest light in at the windows of the room where Savile Heaton's books and better occupations lay scattered about, testifying alike to the contrast of his tastes with those who had surrounded him, and to the haste with which he had departed.

No place,—no corner of the wildest desert or the deepest wood—is so silent as the room in which we have been accustomed daily to hear a familiar voice. When Maggie came down in the mid-day, there was more weeping. And, when, later in the afternoon, Sir Douglas in his pity rode over to see her, and actually proposed that she should come up and dine at Glenrossie, she shook her head; saying she would rather 'stay amang her mon's bukes and think o' Kenneth;' a piece of vague sentiment which found favour with the tender-hearted soldier; though indeed there mingled with Maggie's real sorrow, a covert repugnance to be sorrowful in presence of Gertrude; whom she persisted in looking upon as a 'fause-hearted jilt,' and a 'proud jade,' and connecting her with Kenneth's long absence and heavy discontents, as shown in his own angry letters and confessions.

Sir Douglas, too, had his extra sadness out of the bad news. He thought over the sentence, "Tell my uncle to forgive everything—as I do!" Did the lad still think himself wronged? and how? What had been his grounds for resentment and complaint? Un-

just ; of course unjust, for Sir Douglas's conscience was clear of all offence, but still existent. What had he to 'forgive,' even in the waywardness of his own warped imagination ?

Sir Douglas's heart ached as he sat through the silent dinner, where all were thinking in their various ways of Kenneth ; and ached next day when he sat in his wife's beautiful morning room, gazing abstractedly over his book at the light on her shining hair, and the gay patterned tapestry border she was working.

As he looked, he sighed ; and at the sound of that sigh she looked up ; and then she softly rose, and coming towards him, tenderly kissed his saddened brow.

'Oh, my love ; my dearest love ; I wish,'—said Sir Douglas hesitatingly, 'that I knew about Kenneth !'

'We shall have news of him soon,' Gertrude answered in her low quiet voice.

Some inexplicable link in that chain of memory, 'wherewith we are darkly bound,' brought vividly back to Old Sir Douglas a scene of the past. He saw his Gertrude, his young wife, in her actual form ; but he saw also, beyond, and as it were *through* that bright visible presence,—his Gertrude yet younger ; the fair girl of the Villa Mandórlo, the night he had yearned to ask her about Kenneth, and had refrained.

Then, also she had kissed him. It was her first caress. The caress, not of passion, but of a tender and instinctive wish to comfort.

So, now.

And then as now, the sense of anxiety—of love unutterable—and of being baffled in his wish for some clear certainty about his graceless nephew,—had blended into pain and oppressed him.

But, she was there, that lovely wife who loved him ! He ought to be happy and contented, if ever man was. He could not vex her. He would not question her.

So, day by day, they waited news of Kenneth, in silence and hope.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAVILE HEATON CONQUERED.

News came. First bad and depressing, then better; Kenneth more cheerful; greatly pleased at Savile Heaton coming out to him; Giuseppe invaluable, as gentle as a nurse, and as active and robust as he was gentle. Then a fluctuation of worse again. Kenneth had a relapse, and was in an alarming state of depression and weakness; messages were received from him, of penitence and remorse for wasted years and misapplied energies; which tender Sir Douglas wept over, exulted over, repeated with a quivering smile to his wife, and then went back to old memories, old plans, old hopes, that had begun when he thought he would get Kenneth, the brother, sent to Eton, and 'made a man of;' and flowered once more (after the disappointment of that life) when little Kenneth, the orphan, was trusted to his benevolence.

Kenneth was to get well; to reform, to marry, to be once more beloved, and cordially welcomed. All was to come right.

And, as far as Kenneth's recovery was concerned, all *did* come right. Savile Heaton's simple straightforward letters gave a most graphic account of the increasing strength and irritability of the patient; and he dwelt with much sympathy on the *naïve* gladness with which Giuseppe accepted all instances of ill-temper and impatience as so many proofs of convalescence. He especially narrated how once, when Kenneth had passionately stamped and sworn at the young Italian for some slight delay in bringing a bath, Giuseppe was afterwards met by Heaton in the street, with his eyes lifted in beaming prayer to a painted wooden Madonna in a blue gown covered with golden stars, fixed over the door of a corner house; and, being greeted as that good clergyman passed, joyously informed him he had been 'rendering thanks to Mary and the Santo Bambino; for certainly now the young Excellency was becoming quite himself again!'

And quite himself again, Kenneth accordingly became.

After that desirable consummation, for a while the accounts became scanty and confused; and all that could be gathered was, that Savile Heaton was very unwell; then worse; then prostrated with low typhoid fever; then too weak to send personal accounts,

and then,—after a pause,—a letter came from the English Vice-consul, stating that the Rev. Savile Heaton was DEAD ; that he had been buried with great respect and attention, had been followed to the grave by three or four English residents at San Sebastian, and by the Vice-consul himself ; who had been much impressed by his kindly and devoted care of the first invalid, Mr. Kenneth Ross (whom he had since understood to be his step-son), and much pleased with his gentlemanly and diffident manners.

He added, that news had been sent to Granada,—whither young Mr. Kenneth Ross had betaken himself as soon as he was able to move,—of the extreme danger of his step-father, in order that that young gentleman might consider whether it would not be advisable for him to return ; but that he had merely sent a letter (after rather an anxious period of suspense on the part of those who had addressed him) expressing his regret at the news, and desiring that ‘if anything happened’ to Mr. Savile Heaton, the Vice-consul would have the goodness to see that his papers, and all things belonging to him were properly taken care of, and transmitted to the care of Sir Douglas Ross, of Glenrossie, Scotland.

The Vice-consul was happy to assure Sir Douglas that such also had been the sole instructions given him by the dying man ; who had indeed expressed himself in a way that must give Sir Douglas much pleasure ; saying that he was ‘the best friend he ever had, and the best man he ever knew.’ That he had shown anxiety that some little valuables (ornaments of some sort) should be safely transmitted to his widow, with the message that during the very few opportunities he had had of being out in the open air during Kenneth’s illness, he had endeavoured to find something that would please her to wear for his sake. That he had sunk with such extreme rapidity at last (not being of a robust constitution), that he had been unable to write particulars, as he desired, to his wife and Sir Douglas : but that he had died most peacefully. There had been delirium, of course ; and there had been some confusion in a recommendation he apparently desired to make to Sir Douglas, that he ‘would endeavour that Kenneth should do his duty *by his mother*’ (at least so the Vice-consul understood him) ; but at the last he was extremely clear and collected, and his final words, in answer to an expression of compassion which escaped that gentleman as to his being *alone* in such an hour, were, ‘Not so alone as I appear. It is a great thing to die with perfect trust in God’s mercy, and perfect trust in some surviving friend.’ After which brief utterance he sighed once or twice, shivered, sighed again, and lay still.

Something 'had happened' to Mr. Savile Heaton ; according to the possibility indicated in the letter from Granada—DEATH had happened.

When the news came to Torrieburn, the results were pretty much what might have been expected. Great regret and respect were expressed by some members of his scanty flock ; great weeping and wailing on the part of Maggie : great pity from Sir Douglas and his wife.

Lorimer was at Clochnaben when the accounts were sent over to him. He read them slowly, set his teeth hard, clenched his hand, and looked gloomily at his mother, who had been talking meanwhile in an under-tone to Alice, respecting the news. Mr. James Frere was present, and very silent.

'Well, Lorimer, you need scarce look at me as though I had cut the man's head off,' said the feminine dowager, as she caught her son's glance.

'I was not thinking of you, mother.'

'Of him, then. If you had one ounce of sense in those brains of which you are so proud, you'd think it the very best thing that could happen. When a man's in everybody's way, the sooner he's lifted out of the way the better. That's my dictum.'

'Neither (though I do not agree with your dictum) was I thinking of Savile Heaton's hard fate.'

'He was taken in God's good time,' interposed Mr. Frere.

'Perhaps you'd condescend to say what you *were* thinking of, that makes you look as if you wished we were all supping on poisoned brose,' snarled Lady Clochnaben, without noticing the interruption.

'I was wishing,' said Lorimer, with bitter vehemence, 'that, whenever "God's good time" shall come for Kenneth Ross ; he may die as forlorn a death as the man who nursed him to recovery, and whom he deserted when it was his turn to render service. And I wish it with all my heart and soul !'

'Devil doubt you !' retorted the Dowager ; 'but I shouldn't think your banning or blessing would make much odds in what's settled above for that young reprobate : and, though with him (as usual) bad's the best, he had his excuse this time, I suppose, in being too weak for journeying.'

'A man is never too weak to do his duty ; that's *my* dictum,' said Lorimer, with a provoking echo of his mother's manner. 'He can but sacrifice his life in doing it ; if that particular occasion be, as Mr. Frere terms it, "God's good time to take him." Mr.

Savile Heaton risked his life, and lost it, in doing what he conceived to be his duty by his step-son ; and we should all be thankful, meanwhile, to hear that the worthy object of his solicitude is convalescent, and enjoying life at Granada.'

'Oh ! Mr. Boyd, you do hate Kenneth Ross so', said Alice, with a deprecating drawl.

'Ay,' chimed in Lady Clochnabon, 'and hate him not altogether for his faults, either ; though his death would do you little good *now*, Lorimer.'

She gave a clutch to settle the black silk condemnatory bonnet a little lower on her forehead, and laughed a short, hard cackling laugh as she spoke. But the pale anger of her son's face seemed rather to check even her masculine courage, and she hastily added :

'But you were always besotted with any of the people Sir Douglas chose to take up. I wonder you don't offer yourself as third husband to that ranting red-haired woman at Torrieburn ; who faced me out about my factor and the cart-wheel, on your direct encouragement.'

Lorimer made no answer. He was deliberately folding up the papers he had been reading ; and, having done so, he rose.

'Where are you going ?'

'To Glenrossie, to see how Douglas bears this.'

'Are you coming back to-night ?'

'No.'

'Shall you be back to-morrow ?'

'I don't know.'

'Humph ! I'm sure, whatever your return to Italy may be to Sir Douglas and Lady Ross, we'll have little miss of your company *here*.'

'You will the better bear my departure on Wednesday.'

'The day after to-morrow ?'

'Yes.'

'I presume you have communicated the fact to the friends you prefer ; you certainly never warned *me* that you were going so soon.'

'Warned you, mother ? My stay is no pleasure to you—my absence no pain ! Would to God—'

But Lorimer did not speak out the rest ; or the hard mother might have heard that son of gloom declare his wish that *he* were lying buried in a foreign grave at San Sebastian instead of Savile Heaton ; followed to the tomb by strangers and an English Vice-consul, instead of wept for by natural friends. " *Parva Domus ;*

"Magna Quies!"* muttered he to himself. And then he held out his hand in token of farewell to the angry dowager.

She choked a little, in spite of her assumption of utter indifference.

'I suppose this is not good-bye for good and all, in spite of sulks, eh, Lorimer?'

'No, mother; I will see you again before I go to Italy.'

It was spoken very sadly. He bowed to Alice and to Frere, and was gone.

'Give way once, and be ruled for ever; that's my dictum,' said Lady Clochnaben, after a brief pause. 'Lorimer was always a heavy handful; even as a child he was neither to drive nor to lead. But he's a clever brain—a clever brain.' And she glanced, with a mixture of pride and discontent, to the scarlet-bound books on a further table; Lorimer's college efforts.

Mr. James Frere rose and brought one of the volumes. "I will read one or two aloud, if you please," said he.

A grunt of assent gave the implied permission; and after that exercise, Mr. Frere's own talents were the theme of discussion. Savile Heaton's place was empty. His preaching voice was dumb.

It made Alice Ross almost playful. There was a pretty glitter in her cat-like eyes, and a sort of purring murmur of underlying content in her slow soft voice, whenever she answered, or volunteered an observation.

And meanwhile over the hills, in the calm western light, went Lorimer Boyd; to that other castle, where the *magna quies* co-existed yet with life and hope.

Sir Douglas had not returned from a pilgrimage on foot to Torrieburn; but Gertrude, who had driven over, was resting on the sofa, looking very pale and wearied. She welcomed Lorimer eagerly, and, after the first greeting, burst into tears.

'It is very foolish,' she said, smiling through that transient shower, 'for Mr. Heaton was almost a stranger to me, and he was a good man; a pious man; but there is something forlorn in his going away to die so, in a foreign land; and I am not very strong just now, and poor Mrs. Ross Heaton is so vehement in the expression of her feelings that it shakes one's nerves!'

Lorimer stopped her, with more emotion than was usual in his manner.

'Oh! for God's sake, don't excuse yourself to *me* for being

Spoken of the grave:—

"A narrow home, but much peace."

tender and womanly,' he said. 'Better to me is *any* expression of feeling; better the animal howling of that poor untutored creature of Torrieburn—than the iron hardness one sees in some hearts! She may well lament Heaton, for a more indulgent gentleman never tied himself for beauty's sake to an uncongenial mate. And he had dignity too. No one ever could have seen—who did not watch him closely and understand him thoroughly—how often he felt wounded and ashamed of the choice he had made (if indeed we can term it choice; for I believe the determination to marry was rather on Maggie's side). I have heard her herself say he had never given her a hard word; if I had been her husband I am afraid she would have heard a good many.'

And, with the last words, the saturnine smile returned to Lorimer's lips, and the conversation took a more cheerful turn between him and Gertrude Ross.

Dear companions they were; dear friends, through shade and sunshine. Gertrude had said no more than she felt, when on a former occasion she wished he had been born Sir Douglas's brother. And Sir Douglas loved him too; with that strict divine attachment which in its perfection we are assured 'passeth the love of woman,' and which an old poet has immortalized by comparison with a yet diviner communion:

'Since David had his Jonathan,—CHRIST his John.'

But deep in that gloomy and reserved heart was an affection for ever doomed to be checked and caged and kept within limits; the love for Gertrude herself. Gertrude, who fulfilled all his notions of what woman should be; and by a vision of whom he was haunted in his uncongenial home whenever the hard fierce 'dicta' of his mother, or the sly cat-like ways of Alice, grated on his senses with a more repulsive force than usual.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE DAYS THAT GROW INTO YEARS."

THE pages which divide the events of life turn very slowly; but the pages which narrate the history of a life, turn rapidly. Events which change whole destinies compress themselves into a single sentence; joy goes by like a flash of light, and tears which have

wasted the very eyes that wept them, demand no fuller record than the brief monotonous lament of poor Marguerite in 'Faust':

'Ich weine, und weine, und weine!'

Gertrude's life was gliding by in sunlight and joy. Bonfires had been lit on the pleasant hills for the birth of an heir to Glenrossie; and the little heir himself was already beginning to prattle the thoughts of childhood; and puzzle his elders, as all children do, with questions which theologians, moralists, and philosophers, would attempt to answer in vain.

'Old Sir Douglas' was very little older; but at that age, silver begins to mingle with the brightest and curliest hair; and the temples of that broad frank forehead were getting higher and barer, and smooth under the touch of the strong little rosy fingers of his idolised boy.

Mr. James Ferra had found a clear field after the death of Mr. Savile Heaton; and had so far modified his views of open-air worship, that he had eagerly seized the opportunity of 'mentioning' to Sir Douglas (backed by much more skilful 'mentioning' on the part of Alice Ross), that he would not object to succeed that simple and uneloquent preacher; and endeavour, by the grace of God, to lead the little flock (so ill taught hitherto) into the right way.

The schools, founded by his earnest predecessor, were also placed under his superintendence; and rigidly were the children trained and looked after. The penitential Sabbath, instead of the holiday Sabbath, was established amongst them. The 'Lord's-day' was erased from the book of common life, and left blank from all human interest. To swear, to lie, to thieve, to strike even to bloodshed, were gradually shown to be less offensive to the Creator, than to hum a song, whistle a tune, write a letter, take a sauntering happy walk over the hill; or sit chatting under the birken trees in the heather braes, overlooking the silver lake.

A boy of ten was excommunicated, as it were, and expelled the 'schule,' for being found with his mouth and pockets full of blackberries, so freshly gathered that they *could* only have been procured on 'the Lord's-day' by the terrible desecration of gathering them on his way to service. In vain did his old grandmother plead in guttural and nasal accents that the creature 'was but a wean,' a 'puir wee laddie that wad be mair circumspick' for the time to come. The time to come was blackened, for him, with public reprobation; and, as his compeers passed him, sitting alone in the ingle nook, or on the stones in the sunshine, they nudged each other on the shoul-

der and whispered, 'Yon's Jamie Macmichael, that the meenister 'ull no permit to enter, ye ken ; he brake the Lord's-day !'

Bolder and bolder grew Mr. James Frere under the consciousness of his own increasing influence ; and little by little his flowery and eloquent discourses crept even to the forbidden margin of the habits of Glenrossie Castle ; to the occasional omission of attendance, and the 'forsaking of assembling ourselves together ;' to the neglect of bringing the young scion of the house of Douglas to the house of God,—even as young Samuel was brought by his grateful mother, in the very dawn of his consecrated days : indeed, at an age so tender, that his mother made a little coat for him and brought it for him to wear each successive year.'

An image, which so far from wanting impressiveness in the ears of the listening population, caused the auld wives to look up with trembling reverence and conviction at the face of the preacher.

Neither did Mr. Frere spare even the 'Lady of the Castle' in his fervent denunciations. The singing on Sabbath evenings, even though —(as it were to compound with the devil)—the songs sung were harmless, pathetic or religious ; the glad walks and laughing conversations ; 'heard by God, as Adam and Eve were overheard when His voice wandered through the stillness of Paradise in the fall of the day ;' the robes and the sumptuous apparel of the graceful earthly form ; the long residence in foreign lands, and the bringing forth out of those lands the minstrelsy of a foreign tongue, 'yea, even such songs as Rizzio sang to Mary, and Mary with Rizzio, when her soul went forth to commune with temptation, and with the powers of darkness, and with sensual passion, and the confusion of all things right with all things wrong ;'—all this the new minister preached upon ; more especially on those Sundays when Lady Glenrossie failed to show herself in the high old-fashioned pew : to which Mr. Frere on such occasions lifted his fine eyes, commenting on 'the darkness of its emptiness,' and not unfrequently sliding in some wonderful way into a comparison of himself and John Knox,—who boldly spoke forth the commission given unto him by God ; fearing not the authority of kings, under the King of kings ; nor the power of the beauty of woman, nor her silver tongue, nor the ruddy colour of her cheek, nor the tangles of her shining hair, while yet these things were belonging to one unregenerate and unredeemed : but with an iron tongue,—like a bell that will call to church whether men come or no, or like a clock that will certainly strike the hours and tell that they are passing or past, whether men listen or no.—so did the iron tongue of John Knox sound in the ears of that unre-

generate queen and her sinful companions ; and so would he (James Frere), while yet his tongue remained unpalsied by disease, and unquieted by the silence of death, continue to speak, "yea, to cry and to shout, in the name of the Lord," if so be that by such speaking he could stir the heart of but one thoughtless sinner, and bid such a one turn to God while yet there was time ; before the birthright of Heaven was sold for the mess of pottage served in an earthly porringer ; before the vain weeping should come, in a bitter shower like the waters of Marah, when the soul should find no place for repentance though seeking it carefully with tears !'

And now and then,—though sparingly and cautiously,—Mr. James Frere would allude to his own self-sacrifice in the service of God : and leave the impression on his hearers (however that impression might be conveyed) that he might be called away to a more extended sphere of usefulness at any moment ; and would then conceive it his duty to go,—'even if it were to the blackness of savage lands, where the tiger prowled and the lion roared and the hyena glared through the desolate night, preying like Satan on the unwary ; or into the mirth of dissolute cities, where festering sin and disease threatened the very life of the preacher.'

But, in the meanwhile, his whole soul was as it were wrapt and encompassed by the flame of desire to be of use in that special district committed to him by an over-ruling Providence.

He felt no scorn for the smallness of his task ; for the Master who meted out his talents gave so many as He pleased, and no more, to each servant to employ ; and, few or many, it was that servant's duty to double them. And often, he assured his listeners, he spent the day in prayer and fasting ; in 'lifting up his eyes unto the hills, thinking of the coming of the Lord,' and neither allowing bread nor meat to enter his lips till he had searched his heart to the uttermost, and cast out of it 'the evil thing : ' as he humbly, earnestly—yea, with a cry of anguish as it were, implored his attentive hearers to do ; that so they might stand pure,—as pure, at least, as sinful flesh and blood might hope to do, in the sight of God.

And Mr. Frere's exhortations, and his mysterious allusion to the 'evil thing,' and to his state of semi-starvation,—supported as that last allusion was by the spare figure, the meagre cheek with its hectic flush, and the bright abstracted look he wore when in the pulpit,—had a wonderful effect on the congregation : his hearers increasing and multiplying daily. And though there was little opportunity of practising abstinence, among a population whose

chief sustenance was the harmless earthly pottage of 'oatmeal parritch,' still a certain notion of the merit of all asceticism gained ground more and more amongst them; and above all a habit of watching whether *their neighbours* were casting out the 'evil thing' with proper diligence and energy. And the condemnation by each man of his neighbour grew and prospered accordingly.

Their Sabbaths were passed in the most rigorous strictness, and the utmost unfriendliness. The disposition to meditation and prayer in the long do-nothingness of the tedious hours, was principally shown in meditating on the various faults of the men and women by whom they were surrounded; and in thanking God that *they* were not 'as other men.'

Gertrude went about doing good, as usual: soothing the sick, comforting the afflicted, relieving the poor. But her benefits were somehow differently received from the former days. A strong, though vague impression that she and Queen Mary, and Mr. Frere and John Knox, were not dissimilar,—haunted the minds through whose very narrow chinks the light of his preaching had come. Many felt almost a remorse at having to be thankful at all to one so 'unregenerate and unredeemed;' whose future fate it probably would be to seek repentance carefully with tears when it was too late to find it; and who meanwhile was certainly going home to sing outlandish songs 'such as Rizzio had sung to Mary, and Mary to Rizzio,' in those days of sinful feasting which preceded his assassination, and the confusion of the whole Scottish kingdom.

So wore the time away. Gertrude unconscious of her waning popularity; happy in a husband's love, and glorying in her child; loving with a tender love the mother whose brightest quality was the love she also felt for that dear daughter; and still trying to 'pet' Alice—icy, alien, furtive-glancing Alice; and innocently dreaming she had succeeded! Glad, not jealous, at seeing Alice made more of than ever by Sir Douglas, whose love and happiness (good measure heaped up and running over) flowed to all within his reach. Glad, not jealous, at the regard shown to Sir Douglas's half-sister by the poor and the small tenantry; who deemed Alice Ross far more 'douce and discreet' than the Queen Mary of Glenrossie Castle, and treasured many a word and action intended by shrewd Alice to produce precisely that impression; unwitting all that those grains were dropped on purpose for their gleaning,—to sow in narrow fields of thought, and bear seed in their turn!

And it was in the midst of the swiftly passing though uneventful current of life thus described, that Sir Douglas entered Gertrude's

bright morning—on one summer's day, shortly after they had returned from a brief sojourn in London; with a bundle of papers and letters half opened in his hand; his countenance so flushed and irradiated with emotion and gladness, that Gertrude wondered what could have happened, and thought that, much as she admired him, she never yet had comprehended how nobly beautiful was the dear familiar face.

‘Gertrude—my sweet love,—Gertrude,’ he said, ‘I have a letter from Kenneth;—really an admirable letter; full of feeling and steady purpose and good plans,—and regret for the past. He begs me to try and arrange for the last time (you know he has still been rather imprudent of late); and says he is about to be married, to one every way satisfactory; indeed, I know the name of the family he mentions. A Spanish girl, of high birth, wonderful beauty, and good fortune, whose acquaintance he made at Granada, just after that terrible illness; her family were extremely kind to him; and indeed knew all about his people, as I know hers. It is a most glad and blessed piece of intelligence! He is to return here, as soon as he is united to his bride; and he hopes you will like her, and congratulate him. Your dear mother will be here soon: and we shall be a most joyful family party. Poor Kenneth! Well, at last all will be safe for him. He will steady and settle at last. Kenneth going to be married; it seems like a dream, does it not?’

‘A very happy dream,’ Gertrude murmured, as she smiled up in her husband's face with those serene eyes, whose gaze was like what we imagine a seraph's might be. ‘A very happy dream!’ and she gave a sigh of relief, thinking how often she had rather dreaded Kenneth's reappearance after all the stormy scenes of Naples, and the threats of the Villa Mandórlo.

But Sir Douglas knew none of those things.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FAMILY GATHERING.

WHETHER it was that Kenneth desired the first impression on his bride's mind of all things in Scotland to be favourable—conscious that, with his usual spirit of boastfulness, he had exaggerated all

that was good, and suppressed all that was bad, in the mention of his home—it is certain that he very eagerly accepted the cordial invitation of Sir Douglas to come to Glenrossie ‘till Torrieburn was more ready.’

He arrived very late, in what splendour four horses from the last inn on the road could supply; and put off seeing his mother till next day, when he was to carry a commission from Sir Douglas to ask her to come over and be introduced to his Spanish wife at the Castle (because he was sure the latter would be ‘too fatigued to go to Torrieburn’) and remain to dine and sleep there.

Doña Eusebia Ross received the embrace of her new uncle and aunt, muffled and mantled as she was, with eager demonstrations of joy, and what the French call *effusion*. Lady Charlotte had arrived only a few minutes before, and Gertrude was anxious to chat with her mother, and see to her comfort; so that till the toilettes were over, and dinner served, the ladies saw nothing more of each other.

When Doña Eusebia did at last appear, they saw a most undeniable beauty: though she looked (as, indeed, she was) some years older than Kenneth. What with the splendour of a rich complexion, made richer by the addition of rouge; the glossiness of hair made glossier with strongly scented oils; the deep crimson of the carnations twisted with black lace, on her head; the gems that glittered on her neck; the sudden turn and flashing of her glorious black eyes, and the equally sudden flirting and shutting of a painted fan mounted in mother-of-pearl and gold, the motion of which was so incessant that it seemed an integral portion of her living self; what with the gleaming smile when the curled lips parted and left her white teeth, like waves in the sunshine disclosing a shell; what with the pretty trick she had, at the end of every laugh (and she laughed often), of giving a mischievous bite to the full underlip, as though to punish it back to gravity; and what with the fling and leap of the soft fringes on her robe when she turned with quick animation to answer you,—there was so much lustre and movement about her, that it seemed as if she were a fire-fly transformed by magic into a woman. And, if she stood still (as she very seldom did), the curve of her neck and back resembled some beautiful scroll-work in sculpture; while her tiny forward foot shone in its satin shoe, a separate miracle,—for you wondered how anything so small could have so much strength and majesty in it.

The old family butler looked at her, and at the little odd gummed curls on her brilliant cheek, while he helped her to wine, with profound disapprobation; but his subordinates were so struck with

admiration they could scarcely attend to their duties,—and only wished Old Sir Douglas had carried off such a matchless lady, as young Mr. Kenneth had found, when he also resolved on bringing a wife from ‘foreign parts.’

After dinner she sang. Melancholy soft ‘*modinhas* ;’ animated martial airs ; and odd saltatory music, that seemed as abrupt in its sudden intervals of sweetness as she in her own proper movements. Trills and cadences, exclamations and pathetic sighs, and now and then, a beat of the tiny vehement foot in accompaniment, filled up the measure of her performance.

If the music of the lute, ‘when Rizzio sang to Mary, and Mary to Rizzio,’ was of a sort held to be dangerous to their mutual morality, what ought to be the result of Doña Eusebia’s melodious exercises ?

‘Oh ! I really do think,’—said Lady Charlotte to Sir Douglas, as she sat perplexed and wondering on the sofa, anxiously pulling the memorable ringlet to its full length and then letting it go again, —‘I really do feel as if she was somebody in a story : somebody, you know, who flies about at night,—like the ballet,—I mean like the Sylphide in the ballet. Only, of course, she isn’t as good as the Sylphide ; at least the Sylphide I saw Taglioni do, long ago, one could not help being sorry for, and, except that she flew about, she seemed so quiet, you know ; but of course it would have been better if the lover in the ballet had loved the Highland girl in the green plaid. Still she was so wonderful, that one can’t exactly wonder—but I dare say this one will keep Kenneth in good order—don’t you think so ?’

Sir Douglas smiled, rather abstractedly ; he was musing over the prospect of life-long neighbourhood and companionship between this Spanish woman and his wife. He looked at his serene, dove-eyed Gertrude. The serene eyes were bent gently and with extreme approbation on the singer. As they left the piano, and Eusebia lingered to lift gloves, and rings, and a bracelet with pendent jewels which Kenneth reclasped on her arm, Lady Ross bowed her head while passing the ottoman where her husband was sitting, and whispered, ‘What a bewitching creature !’

And Kenneth also evidently thought her a bewitching creature. He was what is called ‘passionately in love,’ with his Spanish Doña ; and he occasionally adopted towards Gertrude, in memory of un-forgotten days at the Villa Mandórlo, a manner absurdly compounded of triumph and resentment ; especially when the applause at his bride’s singing was greatest. It was a manner that seemed to say, ‘Ah, *you* wouldn’t accept me, and now see what I’ve got.

A woman with twice your beauty, and four times your voice, and twenty times your talent, and so in love with me that I believe she would stab any one she thought I fancied instead of herself.'

The next evening, and the next, passed off calmly enough. The sinner of Torrieburn came; and saw her son's foreign wife with interest and with admiration; though unable to make out the meaning of the gracious sentences in broken English, which were delivered with the gleaming smile and the '*effusion*' of manner Doña Eusebia thought right in addressing all relatives.

One smothered fear of Kenneth's was not realised. Doña Eusebia did not perceive his mother's vulgarity. The few phrases in the broadest Scotch which Maggie in her amazement uttered from time to time, were Greek to her; but not more obscure than a great deal of what other people said. The over-decoration of Maggie's still handsome person at this festal meeting was scarcely more than she herself had indulged in; and, even if it had been, how was she to know that it was not as much the usual costume of a matronly Scotch lady, as the kilt which she had been shown in pictures, and had already seen worn by peasantry that morning, was, for gentlemen?

So they were all very comfortable, and Sir Douglas very genial and cheerful; and a day was fixed for a dinner to neighbours and friends; some to stay in the Castle, and some only to come 'over moor and fell,' to feast and drink healths, and congratulate on the marriage of Ross of Torrieburn, Sir Douglas's nephew.

When the glum old dowager at Clochnaben Castle ascertained from Alice that Jezebel of the radiant locks was an admitted guest at the Castle of Glenrossie; and would probably, if not certainly, grace with her presence the table of its master, she fiercely and defiantly shook her head with the black silk bonnet on it, at the unconscious card of invitation; and, pinching that oblong bit of pasteboard, between the hard thumb and finger of each hand, as she held it out towards Sir Douglas's half-sister, she ejaculated:—

'Well! that ever I should live to see the day, when such a neighbourhood as ours *was*, when first your mother came here—a neighbourhood of good names and good families, and folk well-to-do and respected—should come to be such a hitherum gatherum as it is now! How Lady Ross could dare to write such words to me—*“Requested to meet friends and neighbours on the happy occasion of Ross of Torrieburn's marriage.”*

'Happy occasion, indeed! I wonder what his fine Spanish she-grandee of a wife will think of the miller's daughter. Friends and

neighbours! was *I* ever friendly, or neighbourly either, with that ranting roaring woman? I'll not stir from Clochnaben; nor shall Clochnaben stir; nor Mr. James Frere, whose name Lady Ross has had just the blind impudence to add in. Expecting decent women, and clergy, and people of a Christian sort, to sit hugger-mugger with women who've done nothing but offend the Lord ever since they were baptized! It's really a thing that should be noticed with reprobation, and young Lady Ross should blush to have written such a card.'

So saying, the irate dowager flung the card into the wood fire crackling before her, and, giving a last trembling shake of indignation to the black bonnet, she added as she watched it burning:—

'Humph! It's not the only thing that ought to go to flames and brimstone. And you may just tell your milk-and-water Lady of Glenrossie that I'm a trifle less bendable than she is; and have neither an old husband nor a young lover to make *me* knuckle down to such company. And when I'm asked to meet such, I answer stoutly, *No*. Keep yourself to yourself on such occasions; that's my dictum.'

But, when Ailie had described 'all the doings' at the Castle: all the singing, and strangeness, and entertainment to be gathered therefrom; when she had described that manner of Kenneth's, which she had shrewdly watched from her half-closed eyes, aided by the light of foregone conclusions; when she dwelt on the offence a refusal would give Sir Douglas, considering the love he had for his nephew; and probably also to the 'Spanish she-grandee' he had married; Lady Clochnaben sniffed, wavered, and covered that retreat from her resolute stand which (curiosity getting the better of propriety) she at length permitted herself to make,—by giving utterance to another dictum; namely, that 'one was no more bound to know beforehand what company one would meet at dinner than what dishes would be set on the table:' that, maybe, Maggie would not be there (this being an interpretation to save her conscience, for she felt convinced of the contrary), but that, if the dreaded Jezebel *did* come, then she would show her neighbourly abhorrence of a neighbour's faults by treating Mrs. Ross Heaton with stern disdain; never speaking to her, never seeming to perceive her presence! and, if she *dared* volunteer an observation intended for the Clochnaben ear, then to pour out such open reproofs, such vials of fiery wrath, as would 'teach the brazen hussy never to forget herself again;' even if she was puffed into as much importance as the toad in the fable by the unheard-of imprudence and apathy of Lady Ross.

An apathy as to the great rules of marriage and chastity, which

could only be attributed to her foreign education, and the idiocy of the mother who superintended it.

And so a haughty condescension of assent was vouchsafed ; and the Dowager Clochnaben,—clothed in black velvet trimmed with *grèbe* bordering, and with a necklet of large single diamonds surmounting a white gauze ruff,—sailed into the great crimson room where the company were assembling, and cast a severe and searching glance over the heads and shoulders of most of the party, to see if the sinner of Torrieburn was there.

Yes, she was ! She was ;—in spite of all proper regulations of human conduct.

And Dowager Clochnaben kept a frown ready to annihilate her, only Maggie never looked her way. She was seated in a great crimson silk arm-chair, one of her large white arms lounging on either side of it ; giving a peculiar look of squareness to a figure already portly. She had on a gown of pale green satin, excessively trimmed with white blond, and rather too short for a lady whose habit it was to sit cross-legged, with one foot in the air. But, beyond that, the dowager could find no comfort from any special ridicule in Maggie's appearance. Mrs. Ross Heaton was fortunately very proud of her golden hair, and had not therefore hidden it with wreaths or lace-caps on this occasion ; she had merely plaited its immense length, and coiled it round, as Lady Clochnaben said, 'just like the sea-serpent she was.'

She seemed extremely cheerful and elate ; rather loud in her laugh, and an object of some attention to the gentlemen immediately near her.

The party was rather numerous. People Kenneth had not seen from childhood were gathered there—names he faintly remembered sounded in his ear—hands utterly unfamiliar clutched his, with sentences of congratulation.

There was Major Maxwell, who had served with Sir Douglas ; and Mr. Innes of Innes ; and three Forbeses of three several places, who had barely a distant cousinship among them, though all bore the same name, and who were accordingly all called by the names of their places, and the good word 'Forbes' never mentioned. There was a remarkably handsome young Highlander in a kilt, with a velvet jacket ; who rejoiced in the title of Monzies of Craigievar and Poldoch, and who had an estate of about two hundred a-year, somewhere 'ayont the hills.' There were Campbells, and Stuarts, and Frasers, and Gordons, all 'good men and true ;' and many who had served their country, though their country was utterly indifferent

to their existence—loyal men, who loved their unseen monarch, and were ready at all times to fight in India, China, or America, as the case might be.

The dinner was gay, and healths were drunk even in the presence of the ladies. The Spanish beauty flashed eyes and fan and jewels, with double and treble energy, and bit her under lip more than ever, and laughed with Monzies of Craignievar and Poldoch. Lady Clochnaben grew grimmer and colder; as the winter sky grows in the fall of the day. Mr. James Frere became excessively animated; insomuch that even the wary Alice was caught with an expression of surprise and something strongly resembling fear, on her generally guarded countenance. And Lady Ross, after also glancing at him once or twice unquietly, gave the usual signal for the ladies to proceed to the drawing-room.

There, the Spanish beauty threw herself full length on one of the sofas, with an exclamation of fatigue and exhaustion. Lady Ross moved towards her, and sat down by her side. Alice conversed in an undertone with Lady Charlotte.

Coffee was served and taken; and then there was a pause.

How could Maggie find courage to address that pillar of black velvet, which stood erect, surmounted by the diamond necklet, leaning one stern hand on the chimney-piece, and setting one stern foot on the fender!

She *did* find courage,—careless courage; did not even know any was needed. Still seated and lounging, she looked up at the dowager and said,—

‘I kenred ye weel by sicht, Lady Clochnaben, but we’re strangers else. Ye were no ow’r willing to show, the day ye mind I cam’ wi’ my puir mon, Mr. Heaton, to speak wi’ ye.’

Lady Clochnaben positively shuddered with anger; but she made no reply.

Maggie raised her voice, already something of the loudest, as if she thought the hearer might be deaf.

‘I’m saying I’m glad we’re met at last, Leddy Clochnaben.’

‘I desire you’ll not have the boldness to address me,’ said the dowager, with excessive fierceness. ‘If family reasons induce persons who ought to know better to invite you among decent folk, you might at least have the decency to keep quiet in your corner.’

‘I keep quiet, mem!’ exclaimed Maggie, bursting with wrath. ‘Who’s the stranger here, I’d fain ken? I’m here amang my ain kin: for the marriage of my ain lad; wi’ a ledddy that’s mair a ledddy, an’ a bonnier ledddy too, than a’ the Clochnabens that ever

crooked on their beggarly midden; and I'd hae ye to ken that I dinna care *that*, for yere airs and yere graces; and, if my mon's dede that wad hae gi'en ye as gude as ye bring, I can tak' my ain pairt: if even I hadn't my lad come hame, and I'll——'

What more Maggie would have said, snapping her white fingers with a rapid and resounding repetition of snaps in the infuriated dowager's face, cannot be known, for an hysterical burst of tears and howls began to wind up (or break down) her oration, before she perceived that many of the gentlemen who had re-entered from dinner, and all the ladies, were gazing at the scene in dismay.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KENNETH QUITE HIMSELF AGAIN.

IT was a second or two before any other sound broke in on Maggie's obstreperous sobbing, and then it was only a very feeble little chirp of sympathy from Lady Charlotte; who, trembling excessively, and locking her hand in that of her daughter, kept repeating, 'Oh, dear, Oh, dear me, Oh, goodness! People really should not be so rude to people.'

Kenneth, struck and stung; and conscious only that some dreaded exposure was taking place, just as he had been secretly exulting in the satisfactory blindness of his foreign wife to his mother's vulgarity; taking place, too, before all the gathered friends of his house and better kindred—flushed with wine, and always ungovernable in temper, strode forwards, and, grasping one of Maggie's large white arms (to which, as she continued to sob, he gave an impatient shake), delivered himself of the brief adjuration,—

'Be quiet, mother; quiet, will you?'

Then Lady Ross spoke; with that expression so rare in her soft countenance, which Sir Douglas remembered in the days when little Zizine was ill and some ridicule seemed cast on Lady Charlotte's lamentings; an expression of reproach and command. 'Kenneth, Kenneth Ross!' was all she said to him; but the tone spoke volumes.

Then, rising, while she still pressed the weak slender hand of her own mother, she turned to the cause of all this disturbance, and

added, in a low tone, 'Lady Clochnaben, this was worse than rude, —it was *cruel*.'

So saying, she unlinked her hand from Lady Charlotte's, and, coming forward to Maggie, she said gently, addressing no one in particular,— 'Mrs. Ross Heaton has had a great deal to agitate her lately, though some of the events' (and she smiled round at the beautiful Spaniard) 'have been very pleasant ones. We mustn't wonder at a little fluctuation of spirits, and the room is very hot. I am afraid of giving Doña Eusebia cold, or I would open the window ; but we will take a turn in the conservatory instead.'

She was leading Maggie away ; half sullen and half ashamed ; when the tall black velvet figure barred her passage with a sort of mocking farewell—

'You'll scarcely expect *me* to stay, Lady Ross, though you did me the honour to invite me without mentioning very particularly who were to be your company. I'll not interfere with your care of Mistress Maggie Heaton. She *looks*, indeed, in very delicate health !'

And, without noticing Maggie's interruption,— 'Ou ! don't begin clawin' and scratchin' again at *me*, ye great grim long-tailed black cat.'—she added,— 'I'm quite aware that you would not wish to offend Mr. Kenneth ; indeed you've a good deal owing to that young man, if all neighbours' tales are true ; and those who can't walk straight must just step crooked, that's my dictum ; only I'd rather not be by, while all's going on that is to go on here, I suppose, now he's come back again.'

'Douglas, will you order Lady Clochnaben's carriage, while Mrs. Ross Heaton and I gather some myrtle in the conservatory ?' said her hostess.

The sweet voice was neither raised nor lowered. Lady Clochnaben's words might have been drops of hail pattering against the window-pane, for any apparent effect they produced on Gertrude.

Nor did she seem even conscious of the sudden stare of Maggie's eyes when Kenneth was so oddly mentioned. Only, as she gathered a sprig of myrtle, and her thoughts flew back on its pleasant aromatic odour to the Villa Mandorlo, and the 'pergola' high above the blue Bay of Naples, she sighed to think that Lorimer Boyd called such a woman 'mother !'

Maggie heard the sigh, and saw the abstracted eyes, and set the sigh down to a more obvious cause. In *her* opinion the sigh was for Kenneth ; and Gertrude was very properly punished for jilting him, even by such insulting remarks as had been made by the long-tailed

spiteful dowager in black velvet ; and, though she thought Kenneth had done much better for himself in marrying such a beauty (with such a heap of jewels) as Doña Eusebia, still she felt a certain ignorant bitterness against the woman who had, in her opinion, been the cause of his long alienation from home, and from her own society at Torrieburn.

But Dowager Clochnaben's conduct was not to be the only wonder of that evening.

When the two ladies returned to the rest of the company, the scene which had taken place seemed really almost effaced. The great crimson room was spacious enough to have made it difficult to hear gaunt Lady Clochnaben's farewell speech, even if they had carefully listened. But no one was attempting to listen, or attending to that dowager's departure. The men guests were most of them a little 'flustered' by the quantity of wine they had taken in honour of many toasts. Kenneth and one or two others were more than half drunk. Handsome Monzies of Poldoch and Craigievar was entirely absorbed in the notice taken of him by the radiant Spaniard. No one clearly understood, or very much cared, what had occurred ; and it was quite easy to accept the solution that Mrs. Ross Heaton had been in nervous spirits, and had taken something amiss that was not intended to be so taken.

Quiet was restored ; and social converse, not grave but gay.

Glass after glass of curaçao and maraschino, imbibed by way of *chasse café*, added to the feverish flush on Kenneth's cheek, and to the careless merriment of others. Then Doña Eusebia,—having duly rested in attitudes of the most piquant grace, and of the most astonishing and shifting variety,—was called upon to sing ; and after much pretty reluctance, the party, as she said, being so 'big,' and she 'but a poor stranger with a small little talent,' consented ; and went through all those sweet varieties of melancholy passion and martial animation, and tiny stumps and long-drawn 'Ays,' from the first sighing *modinha* to the last rapid bolero in her *répertoire* ; while Monzies of Poldoch's nascent moustache positively trembled with admiration, and Kenneth watched this new effect of his wife's music with the haughtiest displeasure.

Gertrude sang too. Rich and sweet was her voice ; pure and perfect the style ; nimble the white fingers that wandered familiarly among the ivory keys without requiring written music. But what was the use of any one singing when Doña Eusebia was by ? Unless, indeed, to rest that most fascinating warbler, and enable her to consider what next she would do, to dazzle, enchant, and madden.

At length even her amazing stock of treasures in the musical way seemed exhausted. 'I can no more, and I have no more,' she said; and looked up with a smile at the listening Monzies; who felt as if those dark liquid eyes had fluttered over him; settled upon him; and, covering him up with warm folded wings, blinded him to all outward objects.

'Oh yes, you have more,' exclaimed Kenneth. 'A beautiful thing; two beautiful things; that "Mexican Mountaineers' Hymn," or whatever you call it, and the "Lament of Matamoros."'

But they both required a different sort of accompaniment, she said; she was 'accustomed to play them on the guitar while her cousin played the pianoforte;' they were 'nothing without that.' The bells of the mules on the mountain-pass must be imitated on the piano, while the hymn of the mountaineers was sung to the guitar. Besides, there should be a man's voice also. The hymn was poor without that. Kenneth might remember it was always sung so by her cousin, the Duc de Martos, at Granada.

Then occurred the second startling event of the evening. Mr. James Frere—who had been sitting very quietly by Miss Alice Ross in a distant corner—rose from his place, and gravely proffered his assistance.

Did he know the 'Hymn of the Mexican Mountaineers?'

Yes; he believed so. If it was the same: if she would pardon his awkwardness. And Mr. Frere ran his meagre fingers very lightly over the keys, playing the air *en sourdine*.

Yes, certainly; that was it; that would do perfectly. Did he also know the 'Lament of Matamoros?'

He thought he did. He was no musician, but these were remarkable national airs, and he had heard them very often from a very interesting young friend; in fact, a young American missionary: a very pious and amiable person, since dead. He only proposed his services that others might not be disappointed of the wonderful pleasure of hearing Doña Eusebia; imperfect services, but he would do his best.

And forthwith the performance commenced.

If Mr. James Frere spoke truth when he said he was no musician, he must have had great ability for learning by ear. No fault could be detected in his playing; the voice, so melodiously strong in his preaching, gave now the impression of skilfully subdued strength, and of an attentive calculation how to leave all the *effects* of the song to the lovely Spaniard. Never, for one semi-quaver of time, did Mr. Frere seem to forget that he was merely singing 'that

others might not be disappointed of the wonderful pleasure of hearing Doña Eusebia.

She felt it. She looked at him, when the hymn was concluded, with a long gaze of searching curiosity. That 'high-born Spanish ladie' was by no means shy. She did not pretend to be shy. She looked him over, from the crown of his obsequious head, past that odd scar on his hand, to the tips of his finger-nails, as she had looked over many other specimens of the same sex; a sex created to admire, obey, and entertain her. And having so perused him, she looked up at Kenneth with a smile, resting her white teeth on the top of her fan, and murmured, in Spanish,—'He says he is no musician; but that is a little fib. He is a *fingidor*.*'

And Mr. Frere answered (also in Spanish), that what he had stated was true. That he had not studied music; that he played *almost* entirely by ear; that he had no time for such studies. His occupations were too serious; too absorbing; he should consider it *wrong* to indulge himself in the pursuit of music. He had not sung for a very long period 'till that evening.'

During the greater portion of this performance, the Italian Giuseppe had been waiting for a pause to advance and obey the impatient signal of Kenneth for more liqueur. His attention was now so riveted on the male performer, that Kenneth at last angrily noticed it, with a '*Cosa c' e?*'

Only that Giuseppe had seen that Signor before, somewhere: he could not recollect where: but certainly somewhere he had seen him, and heard him sing.

And, in spite of Kenneth's cross laugh and observation that there was nothing very extraordinary in the fact, even if it were so, Giuseppe kept puzzling his simple brain as to where and when he had seen this English stranger.

There was something unsatisfactory in his recollection of the man; but he could not clearly make out what it was. Only of one thing he was quite certain, he did not now see Mr. James Frere for the first time.

Meanwhile, much praise was bestowed on that individual; and to the question of frank Sir Douglas, why he had never allowed his friends to know of his talent before, Mr. Frere replied, with much simplicity, that 'no one had ever asked him if he could sing,' adding, with a gentle sigh, that he had already given his reasons why, in his position, it was not a talent he could desire to cultivate.

* Hypocrite, one who feigns.

As to his knowledge of the Spanish language, it was very limited. He had tried to make himself conversant with most modern languages, not knowing where Providence might lead him, in the career he had desired to embrace. The usefulness of a missionary's labours would be much impeded, if his ignorance of all tongues but his own prevented communion with such as might most need his ministry when abroad.

And then Mr. Frere vanished once more into the background, and resumed his place by Alice Ross.

But Alice sat pale and silent, and gave no sign of welcome.

Presently Maggie rose with a yawn and a stretch, and, expressing her opinion that it would be far more 'couth and cosy' if Kenneth would come at once to Torrieburn, and that she had no doubt 'Donna Euseeby' would find things well enough 'sorted' there, without further trouble; and at all events 'auld cats in black velvet' would not be able to intrude unasked, and crow over her—took her son's arm, and, bidding a rather sulky farewell to the rest of the party, departed.

When Kenneth returned from putting her into the carriage, the heated angry look which had been deepening in his face was fiercer than before. No doubt poor tactless Maggie had been saying to her wayward son whatever was least fitted for the occasion. He cast a restless glance at his Spanish bride, who was coquetting with all the might of her eyes and fan with Monzies of Craigievar: advanced towards them: muttered something about 'coxcombs in fancy dresses.' with a scornful glance at the extremely decorated belt and dirk, of that dandy of the hills: and bluntly interrupting Doña Eusebia, told her he thought she had better follow his mother's example, and say good-night to the company.

At first Doña Eusebia smiled, and said 'her eyes were not sleepy, and she would not shut up the poor things in the dark against their will.' But, when a hurried sentence or two had been spoken by Kenneth with increasing irritation, she also flashed fire.

The eyes that 'were not sleepy' seemed positively to expand with anger, and the tiny foot beat with a rapid, tremulous, passionate beat on the ground.

Kenneth turned from her, and spoke to the young Highlander; what he said was not very clear, but the tone of insolence was what no man could brook. He was answered with equal pride and impatience. Sir Douglas saw and heard nothing of what was passing, for he was deep in some colloquy with one of the soldier Forbeses;

but Gertrude was observing them. She came rapidly forward. 'Mr. Ross! Kenneth!' was all she said. But she said it in the same tone that had offended him before during that evening. He laughed bitterly.

'Now that is prime,' he said, with a thick drunken utterance. 'You think, because I was once so fond of you that you could have twisted me round your finger, that you're to govern me all my life! No such thing my dear aunt! (You're my dear "aunt" now, you know.) If my dear uncle had not much authority in old days (as, indeed, why should he?), a dear aunt shouldn't attempt—shouldn't attempt—to—to tyrannise. I don't want to quarrel with Monzies,' added he, with a tipsy smile, 'he's a good fellow, and I'm ready to shake hands with him—to shake hands; it's women that are in fault. *All* women. They're all alike; all d——d coquettes. *You* were a coquette; and Eusebia's a coquette; and I dare say Alice—Aunt Alice—she's a coquette, too—for all she's so demure—and——'

The drunken speech was apparently arrested by the quiet approach of the last-named object of animadversion. A noiseless gliding step had brought pussy-cat Alice close to the group. It is impossible to describe the expression of her eyes while watching Kenneth; amusement, malice, curiosity, and a set determination, were so blended in their half-shut gleaming. Behind her stood Mr. Frere. Something in their silent contemplation of him, checked Kenneth, and recalled him a little to himself.

'Are you two gifted with second sight, and looking at some vision of the future?' he said, with a sneer.

'I am,' answered Alice Ross, quietly; and the odd little smile crept round her thin mouth, and left it.

Mr. Frere turned away with a pious sigh; and crossed the spacious room to the corner where Sir Douglas was engaged in military gossip with his elder guests.

'Good night, Mr. Monzies,' Gertrude said, as she held out her hand to him. 'Do not sit late with Kenneth, discussing the naughtiness of woman; and,' added she,—with rather a nervous smile,—'do not either of you forget that this was a meeting of *friends*.'

The young man bowed low over the gentle hand extended to him; and Doña Eusebia rose, in answer to the still gentler beckoning which summoned her rebellious eyes to sleep. She shrugged her shoulders with a departing glance of anger at Kenneth, and passed up the great staircase with Alice and her hostess sister-in-law.

Very late—long after the last wheels had passed down the approach, bearing away the non-resident guests—Gertrude was startled by hearing the voice of Kenneth once more in anger. She had not slept. She could not sleep. She had heard him come up the stairs and along the corridor with the heavy, stumbling, irregular step of an intoxicated man. Then a stillness. Then the inexplicable sounds of angry speaking, and something more—stamping, or shaking of a door; she could not make out what. All of a sudden a great crash. Gertrude could scarcely repress a scream. ‘Oh, Douglas!’ she said, ‘something has happened! Kenneth—Kenneth had a quarrel—I—I fear——’

She listened again; doubtful, wondering; for now she thought she could distinctly hear a woman’s voice. Sir Douglas opened the dressing-room door, and passed down the corridor.

At the door of her own room stood Lady Charlotte, quaking with fear.

‘It is Kenneth,’ she said; ‘he is very angry. He has burst in the door.’

‘What door?’

‘The door of his room, I think. That is all; only it frightened me so.’

Sir Douglas returned to his wife.

‘Kenneth is not sober,’ he said with a sigh. ‘I suppose he could not turn the handle of his door. He has forced it; that was the sound you heard. I am so vexed, my love, that you were startled out of your sleep!’

Gertrude said nothing. She partly guessed what had happened; and her conjecture was confirmed in the morning by Lady Charlotte, who narrated—with many agitated pulls at the long curl which assisted in all her emotions—how she had heard Kenneth desire Doña Eusebia to open the door that led into his dressing-room. How the Doña had replied she would never see him again, and meant to leave the Castle at daylight. How, after further parleying for a minute or two, there was a dead pause, and then a crash; and then Kenneth’s voice in the inner room, ‘dreadfully angry;’ and many angry answers and weeping; and then his voice apparently apbologising, and excusing what he had done.

‘And oh! my darling, it did so remind me,’ said poor Lady Charlotte, ‘of that dreadful day, you know, at Villa Mandórlo, when he threatened about Sir Douglas, and would insist on your loving *him* instead, and all that! And I can’t think why he can’t be contented now, and not behave like—like a corsair—or something

dreadful. But I'm very glad it isn't you! I mean, that you are not married to him. And one comfort is, that I should think his wife was very brave; she looks brave. There *was* once a Spanish woman who fired off a cannon, you know. The maid of—of Saragossa, she was called. And I believe they are all very daring. I'm sure Doña Eusebia seemed to me as if she would mind neither swords nor pistols. She gives me that idea. Such a slender creature, too! But that's no rule. She wouldn't mind the Grand Turk, I'm sure she wouldn't!

'Well,' said Gertrude, with a sigh and a smile; 'let us hope she will not mind this outrage either. Say nothing of it to Sir Douglas. He only thinks Kenneth Ross got drunk—as usual.'

Nothing of it to Sir Douglas!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. FRERE DISPLAYS ANOTHER TALENT, USEFUL ON MISSIONARY STATIONS.

It was not without some little echo of her mother's trepidation that Gertrude watched for the entrance of Kenneth Ross and his wife at breakfast that morning.

The *esclandre* of a parting, in the very midst of bridal festivities; what a climax to that wayward young man's affairs!

But no such catastrophe was impending. When the newly-married couple reappeared—which they did at separate intervals, Kenneth lounging in long after the usual breakfast-hour—no trace of the stormy scene of the previous night remained. It might have been an evil dream, for any symptom even of its recollection, apparent in the two persons principally concerned.

Kenneth had obviously been forgiven. Probably his bride had had previous opportunities of judging what effect excess of drinking would have on his conduct. She even, to Gertrude's intense amazement, alluded to it with the pretty playful coquetry of manner, and sweet broken English, of which she so well knew the charm.

It was a question, 'what should be done' that morning; and it was agreed that no shooting or separation of parties should take place. They were all to take boat, and row or sail down the lake,

and dine picnic at 'the hut;' a little edifice of stone walls and heather roof, begun by Old Sir Douglas and his brother when they were boys, aided by the keeper.

There, flushed and lovely, they had lifted logs of odorous lately-chipped fir-branches; and stretched their strenuous young arms to build and contrive; panting always to return to the delicious employment, in the midst of carelessly-learned lessons at Glenrossie, and home coercion, such as it was.

There, the beloved little rough dogs, afterwards hung by their cold-blooded step-mother, had fuzzled and rustled among the brown autumn leaves, feeling called upon to partake the excitement, though they could not share the employment, of their masters; and sympathising thoroughly in the apparent opinion of the latter, that the greater the bustle the greater the joy.

Poor little Jock and Beardie! Before that dreadful hanging day, how many days of delight had they shared! What kindly pats and invitations had they received to share bits of oat-cake and potatoes roasted in the hut (tasting terribly of burnt resinous wood); while their masters added to that simple festival, alas! 'just a wee wee drappie' of mountain dew, sipped from the keeper's flask; ever replenished with a fiery nectar, which, like the potatoes, had been prepared in some wild mountain hole where the tax of the excise-officer had never been levied.

Days of boyhood and castle-building on the earth (not yet the vain vanishing of manhood's castles in the air), how sweet and precious are ye, in the after times!

Oh! little huts, and bowers, and play-places,—by many a mountain lake and rush-fringed stream, or wild sea-shore, or in the depth of mellow autumn woods,—does no ghost haunt you? no sweet Egeria dwell there, giving perpetual invitations to return to the peace and innocence, the complete beliefs and holy ignorance, which were our own in those days?

Where are the echoes of those young voices, whose every sound of common calling was like a glad triumphant shout? Where is the dancing light of youthful eyes, that flashed eagerly radiant and clear as stars; eyes that knew no heaviness, and whose tears were shed in such brief showers? Where are ye, young companions, close-knit ties, sportive inhabitants of a paradise where sorrow endured for a day and joy came with the morning, where the lament for irrevocable loss, and the long dreary alienation of maturer quarrels, were alike unknown? Return to us—return!

Return,—stream of life with the sparkle on it, from a light that no longer shines!

It cannot be. As well ask for the harebells that waved in the mountain breeze in those long-forgotten springs; the fox-glove that grew by the woodland bower, and smiled down on the autumn fern, in that sweet and lonesome spot where now, perhaps, stands some busy wayside inn; thronged and crowded!

But this one bower—of the thousands that lie scattered about, sadder than tombs, among the play-places of forgotten generations—had been carefully tended through all days of external change. Kenneth of Torrieburn had first repaired it, and made a fishing-lodge of it,—for the love of absent Douglas, his Eton brother, his soldier brother, his brother far away! Sir Douglas had it afterwards sacredly kept, for the sake of the dead brother he had loved so well. Little Kenneth, the orphan, had been taken to it as to a haunt of memory and love; and there often had Sir Douglas told, how the father he could not remember had helped to build it. And in these latter times Gertrude saw to the re-thatching with heather in bloom, and fresh fir-supports, of that simple edifice; sacred to the past, when Old Sir Douglas was a blooming boy!

It was still, what it was then,—a favourite haunt of the dwellers in Glenrossie; and many a day the silence of the sweet rocky shore was broken by voices—there, and ‘in the broomy knowe under the birken trees,’ where poor Maggie Heaton, in the days of her girlish beauty, listened to Kenneth’s father—and fell.

A merry day now they had on that placid shore; and it was on their landing that the beautiful Spaniard gave utterance to the speech that so surprised Gertrude, as containing a gayer allusion than she would have thought possible to Kenneth’s unhappy vice of drunkenness.

Of the three boats containing the party Kenneth’s touched the shore first, steered by the Neapolitan Giuseppe, who had become a sort of necessity of life to that spoiled child of fortune.

He handed out his bride; who, touching lightly with her thinly-shod little foot on the landing-board, looked up at the rustic *façade* where her own name and the word ‘*Bienvenida!*’ had been woven in rich colours, with dahlias and hollyhocks intermingled with flowering myrtle.

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘that is my own little house, my “descansadéro,” a *palomár* for Kennet and me. Now, walk into my “habitacion” straight, very straight, moch straighter than you could have walk last night, or I will make a very angry “ama di

casa." And drink no drink but the lake water, and that only "with your eyes," like the pretty song of your English poet. For into my "palomár" shall come only loving birds; no "solterón," no stupid old bachelor, nor tipsy man; in this sunshine shall not even the "sombriago" of such a one be allowed—only the young, the gay, the handsome. And Sir Douglas!

The coquettish flash of the large dark eyes at young Craigievar during the first words of the concluding phrase, was lost in the merry laugh of all, at the pause which preceded Sir Douglas's name. He smiled.

'You cannot, at least, make me an exception as an old bachelor,' said he, gaily; 'so let all the boat's crew land, and sit outside Doña Eusebia's "descansadero," for I am sure inside there will only be room for the ladies.'

The day was beautiful; the tempers of all as cloudless as the sky; and the little exaggerated order to drink 'only water,' very slightly infringed upon by the general company; while the poet's line,

'Drink to me only with thine eyes,'

was certainly very strictly obeyed by young Monzies, if by no one else.

But, though Eusebia was coquettish as ever (for, indeed, it was not in her nature to be otherwise), her coquetties were reserved for Kenneth, with very isolated exceptions. That crumb of notice when she landed, and spoke of 'the young and handsome,' was all she vouchsafed to the admiring Highlander that day; or rather that morning, for she relapsed a little, going home by the boat in the early moonlight. She did what many coquettes do, with an assurance and *à plomb* perfectly amazing,—she seemed to forget the very existence of the man she had chatted with so eagerly and familiarly the night before; to be unconscious that he was there; or, at least, that his being there was at all a matter that concerned *her*.

The beautiful eyes sent their glances about like shooting stars, but with the same effect of meteoric distance. She looked across him, and up over his head and beyond, and past his shoulder, and at the sprig of white heather that lay by his plate, but never *at him*, as she had done the previous evening. At which change Craigievar was a good deal nettled and troubled, but only held his beardless chin a little more proudly and stiffly, and addressed his conversation chiefly to his host Sir Douglas, and his hostess Gertrude, without intruding on Eusebia.

After luncheon, a climbing walk along delicious paths shaded by birch-trees and full of fairy knolls; with glimpses ever varying of the silver lake, and far-away mountains, and the one rocky crag conspicuous in the foreground, on which Clochnaben Castle was built, employed their time; and they returned to the 'descansadéro' where blazoned forth in flowers the foreign bride's name, without a thought that could mar the genial gaiety of the day.

Doña Eusebia, indeed, was so full of frolic and *effusion*, that she turned and took a personal farewell of the Hut; kissing the firwood lintelposts under the dahlias and hollyhocks on either side,—as she would have kissed the cheeks of some dowager, in a cap wreathed with roses.

'Adios! adios! pretty habitacion with your *aderézo* of flowers! I will live much in you. When Kennet is good I will come with him, and when he is bad I shall come without him, and you shall be all *desflorecida*. Adios!'

And with the last playful *adios* Doña Eusebia stepped into the boat which had brought her, with Sir Douglas and Gertrude, Lady Charlotte and Kenneth. The other two boats lay off, ready to start in company. Alice Ross, and one or two of the guests at the Castle, with the inseparable Mr. James Frere, occupied one. The other merely reconveyed two of the gardeners who had been employed during the early morning in decorating the hut according to Gertrude's design, and the servants who had prepared luncheon.

Giuseppe was in the boat with Kenneth. It was the only one that had a sail besides the two rowers; but the wind was light and not favourable; so Giuseppe was reclining in the most Italian attitude of *dolce far niente*; all languor except his quick black eyes, which waited Kenneth's commands, and, receiving none, looked back again down on the unruffled water; dreaming, perhaps, of the blue Bay of Naples and patient little Nancella, still reading his treasured deputy-written love-letters, and expecting his long-delayed return.

The party was scated, and Kenneth was arranging a plaid round Doña Eusebia, when she once more stood up, and, with a long musical note of such sweet and passionate intonation, that it woke an answering echo from the shore, sang out 'Adios!' once again. Enchanted with the effect, she repeated it, with all the strength of her fine voice. Then she called out to Mr. Frere, and asked Gertrude to join, and that cadence in unison came back to them. Then with one last adieu, she waved her hands to the Hut, laughing and kissing her finger-tips as she did so, and the boat pushed off.

But, in the very act of waving her hands, that precious bracelet

with all its dangling lockets of rubies and diamonds, which she had been obliged to take off when accompanying herself on the piano, unfastened at the clasp, and fell into the lake !’

‘ My bracelet ! My bracelet ! My bracelet that Kennet give me before we marry !’

‘ Giuseppe !’ exclaimed Kenneth.

And Giuseppe—so languid a minute ago—all life and activity, leaned up, and in a moment more would have dived for the lost treasure. But even at that instant, Mr. Frere’s voice called out, ‘ I see it ! Non turbate l’acqua !’ Do not disturb the water.

As he spoke, he flung his coat into the boat, and plunged into the lake. He rose again, having failed to recover the glittering treasure : gazed downwards eagerly, plunged once more, and seized it, as it curled in among the little rocks that bordered the wild shore by the hut.

His hand was cut and bleeding from the dash he had made among the stones. He swam towards the boat where Doña Eusebia was seated, and lifted the bracelet in triumph as he touched the boat’s side.

‘ Madre di Dio ! Santo José ! Santissima Maria ! I recognise him ! I know him !’ exclaimed Giuseppe. ‘ Touch not his hand, Signora mia ; touch him not, Eccellenza !’

Giuseppe bent over the boat’s side with a mixture of animation and repulsion difficult to comprehend. Mr. Frere seized his arm. Some rapid words in Italian—a wild look of appeal on the part of James Frere—a vehement withdrawal of his arm on the part of Giuseppe—and the bracelet was handed back to Doña Eusebia.

‘ I am too wet to be a good companion,’ said Mr. Frere, somewhat breathlessly. ‘ Give me my coat, I will walk home.’

‘ I will walk with you,’ said Kenneth ; ‘ I had rather. I hate the cramp-up sensation of a boat ; and I am not very partial to recollections of diving.’

He looked at Giuseppe, as he spoke, with a smile ; and Gertrude shuddered, for she remembered only too well the day at Naples—the wild drunken talk—the dreadful plunge—the narrow escape from death, and the long watches of the dreary night that had fagged and worn Sir Douglas !

Involuntarily she looked in that kindly face and sighed, and held out her hand. He pressed it. He, also, remembered !

But Giuseppe’s eyes followed only Mr. Frere ; and, as the boat once more touched the shore, and Kenneth leaped lightly out and

laid his hand on Frere's dripping shoulder, an expression almost of fierceness came over his honest sunburnt brow.

'If the young Excellency did but know!' muttered he.

The other boats also drew to the shore, and young Craigievar was invited to replace Kenneth in the leading barque.

Then it was that the lovely Spaniard resumed her conquering sway over the very inexperienced victim of her fascination; and chatted in her broken English, and talked with her fingers and her eyes; while the early moon stole into the sky with one companion star, and Sir Douglas and Gertrude sat rather silent, both thinking of Kenneth, of his past and of his future.

Lady Charlotte pulled at her curl meditatively: and repeated to Gertrude what she had previously said to Sir Douglas,—namely, that the beautiful Spaniard was 'like something in a story: something not real, you know. But of course *she* is real. Only I cannot accustom myself to her. And she is so very different. Different, I mean, from you, dear! But men do love such different people. They go on choosing and loving, and loving and choosing, till really one don't know what they would be at. Still I'm glad of course that you ain't married to him, and—and I hope she'll be have herself.'

Meanwhile Kenneth and his companion made their way by the footpath at the edge of the lake and inland; glancing from time to time at the boats as they came in sight.

And, when they all met again, and Mr. Frere had gone to his apartment to change his clothes; Kenneth pronounced, with more warmth than usual, that he was 'a capital fellow;' 'a most entertaining fellow;' and he wouldn't object to have a walk with him every day; only he had rather bored him with his prejudices against the Italians (having observed that he had an Italian servant). He was full of the ridiculous notion that they were extremely deceitful and treacherous; scheming, and all that; even went so far as to remark on Giuseppe's countenance; said it was a 'malignant' face, whereas there was not a better-natured animal in all Naples; and told some long story of an Italian valet who had murdered his master in some wild out-of-the-way place, and had then taken his clothes, his passport, and his name, and passed for years as the man himself!—a thing which, after all, might have happened anywhere. Frere had also asked him (Kenneth) how long Giuseppe had been in his service, and whether he meant to keep him, and all that sort of thing. Of course he meant to keep him; never had a servant he liked so well.

But, apparently, Giuseppe himself was getting a little restless ; for the very next day after the boating expedition, he came to Kenneth, and pleaded that now the young Excellency was once more among friends, and among servants of his house, he might dispense with the poor Neapolitan, and the desire of heart that had been kept tranquil while his young Excellency had more need of him, grew strong now to go and marry Nanella, even as the Excellency had married the beautiful lady of his choice, whom might all the saints preserve for ever !

Kenneth's anger was unbounded at this proposal. It was all nonsense. He was used to Giuseppe, and he saw no reason at all why he should be deprived of his services. He offered him more wages : he swore and stormed : finally, he expostulated, and worked on the better part of Giuseppe's easy nature, saying he was certain he should be ill again and require him ; till at last the arrangement was made that Giuseppe should have temporary leave of absence to see his mother and marry Nanella : and, if Nanella would come with him to England and to Scotland, she should be installed as superior in the laundry ; and, if she would not come, Giuseppe must absolutely return for a year in Kenneth's service, till he could look out for a suitable substitute.

So, with many ejaculations and much humble hand-kissing, Giuseppe departed.

Before he went he asked to speak with Gertrude ; and was called into the bright morning-room where she was working, and Sir Douglas reading.

But, whether the presence of the latter was more than Giuseppe had reckoned on, and intimidated him, or from whatever other cause, the young Neapolitan became agitated and confused ; and all that could be gathered was, that he had desired to put their Excellencies on their guard against Mr. Frere. He called him ' Mr. Frere,' though—the saints forgive him—he knew that could not be the Signor's name. He was well assured he had indeed seen him before ; and when he saw him swimming, and with his hand uplifted and bleeding, then all was clear to him ; and though the Signor Frere denied his identity, and said he had never been in Italy, yet he, Giuseppe, knew that it was not so ; and he was proceeding to say more,—in his own verbose and confused way,—when the gentle tap of pussy-cat Alice at the door of the morning-room and her gliding entrance stopped him.

Alice looked at him, as if she also had something to say, and was waiting his departure ; but when he was gone she only smiled

an answering smile to Sir Douglas's look of welcome, and took out her favourite work of floss silk and chenille, and told Gertrude she had come 'for a little advice' about going over to Clochnaben, for she did not like to quarrel with one of her dear mother's oldest friends, and yet she did not like to make the visit if Gertrude objected to continue on good terms with the Dowager after the unfortunate little *saillie* of the night of the dinner-party.

Young Lady Ross smiled quietly. 'I hope the single sentence of rebuke I uttered, will not interrupt our good neighbourhood,' she said; 'and, at all events, that it will in no way change the relations in which others stand to Lady Clochnaben. Douglas will ride over with you; and, if Doña Eusebia would like to make the call and see the grim old castle, Kenneth can drive her in my pony chaise. I am going to walk with my mother and my little boy to see his old nurse. We have been so busy with company lately, that no such holidays have come about.—If Mr. Frere—'

Here Gertrude paused and looked doubtfully at Sir Douglas, who answered hastily,—'Oh! my love, you don't suppose for a moment that I should heed the mysterious warning which that rambling fellow Giuseppe has taken it into his head to give us! I never heard a syllable that could lead me to think Frere had visited Italy, and he talks freely enough of the places and people he has seen. Besides, what are we to suppose the simple fellow meant? I think we need hardly expect Frere to turn into a robber chief or a Roderick Dhu, because Kenneth's man fancies he recognises him.'

'I was going to say that we could mount Mr. Frere as well as Kenneth and some others of the party, if you would give orders about the horses.'

'Well, I dare say Alice will not object to that,' said Sir Douglas, with a smile. 'The more the merrier. Let us prepare a cavalry march upon Clochnaben Castle, and call on the grim lady of the Castle to surrender at discretion. James Frere's visit here ends to-day, and it will be a very brilliant sort of escort, to reconduct him.'

CHAPTER XXXV.

TIES THAT WON'T BIND.

To the verbs which the Clochnaben factor had declared to be *caret* in her ladyship's vocabulary,—namely, *to love* and *to give*,—might certainly be added the verb *to pardon*.

That even Heaven itself should pardon sin, had always jarred upon that stern Dowager's clear sense of the proper temporal and eternal rules with reference to right and wrong. She had once condescended—not to argue the point—but in an interrogative form to express an opinion on this point, to the deceased Savile Heaton, who had faltered out something about 'Christian indulgence' in her presence.

'Now that is so like Lorimer, Mr. Heaton! that nonsense which you have just talked, about indulgence! One would think he had bit you, and inoculated you with his wild notions. Christian indulgence won't go down with *me*, I can tell you. Horrid slip-slop! Means nothing but "don't care," and "Don't Care," as we all know, came to the gallows. Why, Lord love you, man,—if the bad are to get off scot-free the moment they put a pocket handkerchief to their eyes, or find time to drop down on their wanton marrow-bones,—what's the use of being good? If pardons are to drop down from Heaven like manna, whenever they're wanted, then it's all up with justice,—that's my dictum. I don't believe it: and I hope those that sin, and then think to run away from the consequences, will find the devil's pitchfork in their backs before they've run far. There's Heaven for one set of folks, ain't there? and the Lake of Brimstone for the other? That's your crowd, I suppose, if you're anything of a Churchman: and you can't pop the wheat and tares into the same barn—I'm thankful to say—however willing you might be to do it.'

Mr. Savile Heaton had had the presumption to commence a demurrer to this argument:—'The very essence of Christianity,' said he, 'in the great doctrine of redemption——'

But here he was cut short, and mowed down, and gathered up among the bundle of condemned tares in Lady Clochnaben's spiritual barn.

'Essence of fiddlesticks!' said she, snappishly. 'You are not expected to get to heaven by a saunter over the hills, but by a path cut for you; and if you go out of it, worse luck for you. You

needn't, you know, unless you choose. Lorimer once asked me—his mother—for he has no more idea of respect than the sail of a windmill, but just whirls round to his point),—whether *I* felt sure of heaven: and I told him certainly I *did*; I never committed a known sin in all my life, and I suppose I've had my temptations like other people.'

Lady Clochnaben had paused here in her discourse, and settled her black bonnet with rather a discontented jerk; for she had an uncomfortable recollection of her son's manner on that occasion: of his asking whether she also 'gave tithes of all she possessed:' and of his muttering a quotation to himself (a habit of his which particularly irritated her), in a most unconvinced tone:—

'Whom thou dost injure,—thou, that dost not strike,
What thou dost covet,—thou, that dost not steal,
God knows; who made temptations all unlike,
But sin the same.'

And as Mr. Savile Heaton had no ready quotations beyond Scripture texts, and merely gave a gentle sigh in answer to the *finale* of her tirade, there was nothing left to fight about in those by-gone days.

But now, at this present time, with the inhabitants of Glenrossie Castle, (those tares growing up in undeserved sunshine within telescopic range of her own sternly immaculate windows) there appeared to the Dowager a great deal to fight about. And if, in her opinion, the manna of celestial pardon ought not to fall and be gathered by chance sinners whose cases did not even come under her observation, or interest her in any way,—how should she pardon Gertrude the sinful laxity of receiving Maggie Heaton? or that yet more amazing lapse from the right path, which had prompted her to rebuke her guest for impressing on Maggie her true position?

Was it possible that even to *her*, the Countess of Clochnaben,—'an awfu' woman to contravene,' and Lady Ross's superior in every way,—the words had been addressed which censured her as 'worse than rude—*cruel*!'

And by whom were these words spoken,—with that high and mighty air which mealy-mouthed Madam could assume when she chose, though generally she kept her spirit under? By whom? By a chit of a girl, the daughter of that affected fool and dawdling goose, Lady Charlotte Skifton.—Skifton, indeed! a nice name to tack Lady Charlotte's to, who came of well-born people, and was cousin, twice removed, to Lady Clochnaben herself! Who was Mr. Skifton? Who was his daughter, that she should venture—that

she should *dare* address a Scotch magnate in such words of reprobation?

Forgive her! Certainly not. She should be punished: she deserved punishment. People with a keener conscience than the self-righteous Dowager might call it vengeance; but it *was*, in her opinion, the strictest justice. Gertrude should be punished; that was quite settled; even if Lady Clochnaben had a good opinion of her in other respects, which she had not. She had jilted Kenneth, and coquetted with Lorimer, and married Douglas from the *basest* motives of self-interest: that was clear as the day.

'Man, who art thou that judgest another? To his own master he standeth or falleth,'—was a text which had never particularly impressed this female Draco. It must somehow have slipped out of her Bible.

Alice Ross also, thought Gertrude should be punished: though she would have found it difficult to say for what. For being lovely and much beloved, and ruling without seeming to rule, and occupying the place of lady of the Castle, which Alice herself would fain have continued to fill.

Mr. Frere, too, was of opinion Gertrude should be punished. He was satisfied that she would be reserved for eternal condemnation in the next world, but he thought she ought also to be 'chastened' in this: and that, although she might not be decapitated like Queen Mary, she might yet endure such sorrow as the Lord might be pleased to send, to work out her eventual salvation.

Nor was it very long before Doña Eusebia likewise considered that she ought to be punished.

Very skilful and undermining were the tactics of Alice; very broad and daring the tactics of the Pharisee of Clochnaben; but their end was the same. The passionate vain Spaniard was gradually brought to know all that these other ladies knew or thought. That her husband had all but drowned himself for love of Gertrude, who after all had most unexpectedly thrown him over, and married the wealthy Ross of Glenrossie, though all her 'friends' were convinced that in reality her heart was set on his nephew.

That Lady Charlotte had married a merchant; a mere nobody; which accounted for the crafty ambition of his daughter, who was determined to take the best match she could get, without reference to her affections. That Maggie was a vile lost creature, who never would have held her head up, or been heard of in the county, but for the monstrous step taken by Lady Ross, (and by Sir Douglas at

her instigation,) of countenancing her, and treating her as an acknowledged connexion of the family.

All this, with much pity for Doña Eusebia, and hints of her being utterly thrown away, with her amazing beauty and accomplishments. But the spiteful little pecks at Kenneth were very carefully given, for it was very obvious that as yet the Spanish lady was what is called 'very much in love' with her very handsome husband, and Kenneth on his side 'very much in love' with her.

Nothing could equal Eusebia's anger at the discovery of her mother-in-law's position.

That Kenneth had deceived her in more ways than one as to the circumstances surrounding his home, was very evident. Her astonishment at the inferiority of Torrieburn in all but the picturesqueness of its situation and scenery: and her discontent at the arrangements made for her reception there, lavish as they had been in proportion to Kenneth's real means: her irritation at the insufficiency of the smaller establishment to fulfil her notions of luxury,—were vehement and unconcealed. She clenched those *mignonne*, pianoforte-playing fingers, with nearly as much passion as untutored Maggie herself; while she exclaimed to Lady Ross,—

'Ah, these men! Kennet tell me this, his place of Torrie, was yet more beautiful than his uncle's; and see now! What "vileza" is here! But I shall not live here. As well live in the little hut on the lake. Better indeed!'

And Doña Eusebia's black eyes assumed a lurid fierceness, instead of their habitual expression of languid coquetry, as she reflected how many lies, during their many ramblings through the halls of the Abencerrages and the Alhambra, when Kenneth was courting her, that very handsome young Englishman must have told, or indirectly led her to believe; since her dreams at Granada of 'this place of Torrie' had been so very different from the reality!

How completely Kenneth—always rather affected and boastful about his personal belongings, and at that time, perhaps (so lately snatched from death in his fever at Seville), really pining somewhat for home-ties and home—had pretended that all the grandeur and crumbling glory of the palace of the Moorish kings could not wean his heart from the dear and lovely memory of Scotland! How he had expatiated on the enchanting recollections of Glenrossie and Torrieburn, and spoken of the two places as equally magnificent possessions; both estates somewhat approaching in value those of the Spanish Duc d'Ossuna and the Scottish Duke of Hamilton!

Deceitful 'Kennet!'

Lovers' oaths are proverbially most insecure anchors for faith to hold by. But lovers' lies are yet more betraying. The best of men add, voluntarily or involuntarily, a little to the warmth and light of the future they are persuading another to share. The picture indeed is there; but, like all who are showing off a picture, they hold a clear light over it and shade that light with their hand, that it may be seen to the best advantage.

Happy the woman who does not require the 'make-weight' of a home of splendour when she accepts the man of her choice. Gertrude would have been content to live in a settler's log-cabin with Sir Douglas. But even she would doubtless have felt greatly disturbed and discouraged if she had found those long colloquies during pleasant evenings spent at the Villa Mandorlo in describing Glenrossie, to be a tissue of fables. Not for the sake of the home, but the character of its master.

Kenneth's misstatements did not spring from the enthusiasm of the poet, who feels sure that the honey of Hybla will turn into roast beef and silver dishes: nor the artist's, who dreams of a repetition in his case of the fate of Cimabue; nor the lawyer's, who, though not quite without a hope of the woolsack, feels certain that at least he will come to be a judge. For all these offer what they believe they will attain; and, if it prove a deception in after years, it is a deception which they honestly shared. No! Kenneth's was a deliberate, prosaic exaggeration, to help him to obtain the hand of the beautiful Spaniard, the cousin of the Duke of Martos, the daughter of grandees. He had not wooed her like the yearning lover in the old Scotch song:—

'I would I were a baron's heir,
That I with pearls might braid your hair;
I'd make ye bright as ye are fair,
Lassie! gin ye'd lo'e me!
But I hae nought to offer thee,
Nor gems from mine, nor pearls from sea,—
For I am come of low degree,
—Lassie! but I lo'e ye!'

On the contrary, he had wooed her as a Scotch grandee, with a Scottish prince for his uncle; as, indeed, had ever been his favourite *pose* in the previous society at Naples. When Doña Eusebia, therefore, made all the discoveries in which Alice Ross and Lady Clochnaben so eagerly assisted, she was enraged, mortified, and perplexed out of all measure.

But, beyond and above all other mortifications, the terrible *éclaircissement* respecting Maggie, sent the proud *sangre azul*—the ‘blue blood’ of Spain—bubbling in her excitable veins, till it nearly maddened her.

Maggie’s welcomes—her attempts to be on glad familiar terms with the ‘bonny leddy, Donna Euseeby’—the laughing triumph of her white teeth, at having such a daughter-in-law to show the old miller and his wife—the caresses which she eagerly dispensed alike to her ‘lad’ and his bride—the uproarious spirits she was in; loving him as she did in her own wild way, and rejoicing, with a mother’s rejoicing, at his return to Torrieburn so brilliantly accompanied; and at the thoughts of their all dwelling together in that house, where, since Mr. Heaton’s departure and subsequent death, Maggie had resided in a loneliness extremely opposite to her tastes—her kisses, her ‘brewed’ possets, her active walks, her homely ways, her mock dignity and ‘uppishness’ to Gertrude, her state of alienation from the visiting society of the neighbourhood,—all these things drove Doña Eusebia to desperation. They were not merely thorns in her path; they were so many poniard thrusts in her heart. She repulsed Maggie with all the energy of scorn. And Maggie repulsed, was worse than Maggie happy! Sobs and tears, exclamations and explanations, were forced on Kenneth. She wanted to know—she insisted on her right to know—‘what had come ow’r Donna Euseeby,’ who had seemed so friendly and affectionate when first they met at Glenrossie?

She claimed a daughter’s duty—a son’s duty—proper respect and attention as the ‘heed o’ the hoose.’ She cried, she stormed, she upbraided, appealed: till at last Kenneth,—ever-selfish Kenneth—urged beyond his power of bearing,—turned and passionately told her that, that if anybody was ‘head of the house,’ Doña Eusebia was that head. That the house at Torrieburn, and Torrieburn itself, was *his*,—Kenneth’s; not his mother’s. That she must contrive to please and satisfy and succumb to Doña Eusebia, or ‘things would never do.’ That he was already over head and ears in debt; and, *but for her* he would be glad to ‘let’ Torrieburn and its fishings and moor, and was certain he could ‘make a good thing of it.’

He added to all this, that her father paid a ridiculous nominal sort of rent for the mills by the Falls of Torrieburn, and in reality profited by the relationship more than was at all fair; but, that *having been his father’s arrangement*, he, Kenneth, was ‘loth and reluctant’ (that was all; it was not impossible, but he was loth and reluctant) to make any change, or ‘let the mills to any other miller!’

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TEARS OF EUSEBIA.

CONSIDERING that the miller was in fact his grandfather by the mother's side, it was perhaps not to be wondered at that Maggie took these hurried sentences from her 'ain lad' with a mixture of amazement and indignation difficult to describe.

Bursting out into that yowling and howling in which her bitterest sorrows were always expressed; calling alternately and confusedly on her first husband as his father, and her 'ain mon and dear luve of luvcs,'—and on her second husband as Kenneth's teacher and trainer, and above all, her protector, 'wha would just hae stared his twa een oot, gin he had heerd siccan talk as she had heerd that day frae her ain bairn, that she had reared and ay held to,'—she filled the house with her lamentings. Then, as Kenneth left her with a passionate oath, she burst into the newly-decorated drawing-room,—where the 'she-grandee' was practising on the new piano some of those modinhas and boleros which fascinated all who heard them,—and treated that flashing beauty to a tirade in Scotch, of which Doña Eusebia understood little except that she was called a 'weird woman' and a 'fause witch,' and accused of stealing Kenneth's heart and poisoning his 'varry blude,' so that he had come to defy and flout the mother that bore him.

To all which Eusebia indeed attempted some sort of repartee in her broken English, but not succeeding to her satisfaction, awaited the return of her husband (who had escaped the after part of the family storm by going out), and flinging herself on the bosom of his velvet shooting-coat, gave vent to tears and spasmodic grievings to the full as vehement as Maggie's, only infinitely more graceful.

That she should die—that she could bear it no longer;—that she wished she had slept under the waters of the Guadalquivir, the Darro, or the Xenil—before she left her own country for Scotland; that she would go back to her father; write and complain to her brother; sleep in the same grave as her mother; stab herself, and then throw herself into the lake of Glenrossie; go away in the night, and never be found by Kenneth again; that she no longer loved him, and wondered at her own past infatuation; that she still adored him, and could bear for his sake anything—anything BUT this.

All these contradictory declarations did Doña Eusebia rapidly

enunciate; her lithe arms clasping and unclasping Kenneth; now bending his head forcibly down to meet her despairing eyes, their black lashes fringed with silver-dropping tears—now strenuously repulsing his answering embrace with wild negative shakes of her glossy head—now clinging to him faintly, as if she would swoon away, and lose all hold of him and life at once, from sheer fatigue of such exhausting sorrow; now suddenly standing erect and beautiful, stamping those tiny feet, and raising those lustrous eyes in appeal to a justly avenging Heaven, or visionary recognition of her family ties in Spain!

And then sinking once more, dissolved in weary tears, sobbing, with her face hidden in the sofa pillows; only one little smooth ivory shoulder convulsively flapping on those cushions of down, like the broken wing of a bird half murdered by some unskilled sportsman, that had just found strength to flutter back to its nest, shiver there, and so die!

Doña Eusebia knew the value of her tears! They had stood her in good stead with wiser and tenderer men than Kenneth. Many a golden hour of triumph had she bought with that silver change. And if Kenneth was not very tender, at least he was still 'very much in love;' and at all events, and above all things, he hated 'a scene.' Like Henry Taylor's shallow-hearted hero in 'Van Artevelde'—

'He granted her to laugh, for so could he,—
But when she wept, why should it be?'

Why, indeed? What the deuce did his mother mean by making things so uncomfortable, after he had been for years wandering about, and she ought to be so glad to see him? What folly it was in her not to see that Eusebia could not, and ought not, to put up with anything of the sort? Bad enough to have to bring her to Torrieburn, and get her gradually accustomed to the contrast which he privately felt she must institute between the real and the unreal of his boastings, without additional worry of this sort! He couldn't stand it. It made him nervous; it made him ill. He believed the old miller was at the bottom of it all; for the old fellow actually had the impudence to be offended because Kenneth did not greet him with the familiarity he had ventured upon while he was still a mere boy; and had even 'spoken out' about his family grievances, and with the pithy saying, 'Ye'll no blot bygones; yer mither's yer mither, ye ken'—endeavoured to rebuke his conduct as unfilial!

His mother might be his mother: he couldn't help that: and, indeed, he remembered no other parent; but, all the same, he had that in common with even better offspring of irregular ties (from Hotspur downwards), that he inclined to reckon only his more creditable progenitor.

He was Kenneth Ross's son, and Sir Douglas Ross's nephew; but deuce a bit would he consent to be grandson to the drunken old miller, Peter Carmichael, and Betty Carmichael, his spouse.

So the stormy scene ended by his kissing away Doña Eusebia's tears. She was to be a good patient darling, his jewel, his 'alhaya' and keep her promise not to have any more scenes with his mother; and she was to go and pay a second visit to Glenrossie, and then have a beautiful house in London,—after which, if she liked it, they would winter in Spain.

A beautiful house in London!

Certainly something must be done about expenses, and something more must be got out of Torrieburn!

After all, what was the use of foregoing one's rights out of sentimentality?

So Kenneth went straight from Eusebia and her cushions, to his mother; who had likewise prepared things to say to him, but was cut short with that prayer of the passionate, that stands in lieu of a command—

'Now do, for God's sake, my dear mother, keep yourself quiet, and listen to me!'

And then and there this son of one parent explained that Eusebia was not to be contradicted in one jot or tittle of her will; no, not even if her wishes seemed whims in the eyes of 'other persons.' He did not intend her to stay much longer at Torrieburn; there was too much wood and water about the place, and Eusebia's health might suffer. He should cut a good deal of the woods down, and make some other alterations. Meanwhile he hoped there would be no more 'rows,' for he hated them, and it was *vulgar*. Eusebia had been used to the very first society, and, of course, felt the assumption of equality to be unfair. She must be treated with the utmost deference and respect by his mother.

And when outraged Maggie once more attempted an irresistible burst about 'his ain dede father,' and 'gude Mr. Heaton' (she had never called Mr. Heaton by his Christian name), Kenneth broke in with equal impetuosity.—'Pooh! bosh! Heaton was a milksoop, and fit for nothing but to read prayers, and teach Latin to children; and, as to my father, it is not my fault that he arranged

matters so—so awkwardly; we must do the best we can under the circumstances: it is a good deal harder upon me than it is upon you. Now, let there be an end of it; for I am sure I do not wish to vex you more than I can help.'

'Ou Kenneth!' was all the reply from the widowed Mrs. Heaton, as she flung her smart silk apron over her head preparatory to a long burst of hysterical weeping.

And, while she sat weeping at home, Kenneth strode over to the Falls, and stepped into the house of his miller grandfather, whom he addressed with extreme haughtiness, and called 'Carmichael.'

He informed the old man that he was 'about to make some changes;' indeed, 'necessitated' to make some changes; that nothing would be done in a hurry, or without consideration, but that eventually—*eventually*—the mill would probably be set to a younger tenant, and some new machinery tried there.

To all which the old man listened in dogged silence, without rising from his settle by the peat fire; only, when Kenneth had apparently got through all he intended to say, his disowned grandfather looked up with a keen repelling glance, and said, sarcastically,—I'm thinking, if ye ca' me "Carmichael" noo' the beard's on yere chin, ye might put the "*Mister*" till it.'

His wife nudged his elbow, as Kenneth nodded rather sulkily to her and went out.

'Ou man, dinna ye anger him,' whispered the old woman. 'Siena a deevil's bairn us that might send our Maggie packing, and not think twice on't.'

Then they watched the handsome young proprietor of Torrieburn, as, with the strong quick step of youth, he made his way homeward—until he turned the angle of the bridge where his father had met his death, and passed out of sight. And while they watched, they murmured their narrow lamentings in a low monotone of distress; occasionally broken by fiercer comments than Kenneth would have liked to hear.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MR. FRERE IN A NEW LIGHT.

‘OH! Douglas, I was just coming to you,’ said Gertrude one morning soon after these discussions, as he entered her sitting-room; ‘Kenneth has written me rather an odd note, proposing to come here again for a while, till his wife and his poor mother learn to get on a little better together. And Lorimer has written me a still odder epistle about Mr. Frere.’

Sir Douglas looked thoughtful.

‘Gertrude, you must know what all that means, about “getting on better” together. I love Kenneth; yes, I love him as a son; but I cannot shut my eyes to his carelessness about his unfortunate mother; and I am not over anxious that Doña Eusebia should be always with you. I have often wondered you took so heartily to her. You are very different.’

Gertrude laughed. ‘Perhaps that is the very reason: they say people always love their contrasts. I confess I think Eusebia the most charming person I ever met. So beautiful, so accomplished, so winning, so warm!’

And, speaking the last words, Gertrude paused and coloured, for she was conscious in her heart that she was contrasting Eusebia with Alice! Alice, whom she had been requested to ‘pet;’ whom she *had* petted; and yet in whose stealthy pace there was no eagerness, in whose cold eyes no welcome, in the touch of whose passive hand no cordiality: while Eusebia—oh! Eusebia, how enchanting she was!

‘You can ask them, my love,’ said Sir Douglas, ‘as a matter of course: but I would fain see both Kenneth and Eusebia show a better disposition for home. We shall have him wandering away again. He has so little settled purpose. And yet I did my best with him—I did my best.’

Sir Douglas spoke in a musing absent way. He puzzled over Kenneth and his conduct at all times. The two men were so unlike, that each was incomprehensible to the other.

‘Well,’ added he after a pause; ‘and Frere? What is it that our sage Lorimer writes about Frere? He was always rather inclined to find fault with that enthusiast in the missionary line. Does he grumble that we have not yet got him shipped off to New Zealand, or Otaheite?’

‘Douglas, it is very serious. He writes—here is his letter—that he has every reason to think Mr. Frere is an impostor: at least, that he has given an utterly false account of his antecedents. That he would not have troubled himself about the matter, but that Giuseppe, immediately on arriving in Naples, came to him, and told him certain facts which, coupled with Lorimer’s own previous impression that Mr. Frere was not altogether unknown to him, convinced him that you ought to sift the matter, and endeavour to get from Frere a distinct account of the past. It is really rather curious, if you come to consider, how little that is positive we do know about him. He has never been to see the friends he originally stated were so anxious to receive him. He seems to communicate with no one. He has never named places, or persons, in the course of our many conversations on the plans for his future. I think, myself, he is a mystery.’

Sir Douglas smiled. ‘My Gertrude growing suspicious!’ he said: ‘that is a new phase of character. And Lorimer, the cynic that he is, shall have all the credit of your conversion. I really do not see any cause for fear about Mr. James Frere. He is doing his duty strictly; somewhat illiberally, perhaps, according to my notion of religious opinion, but industriously and consistently. As to his moral character, he might vie with St. Anthony, by all I hear; and the only foible I think I have perceived in him is that very reticence of which you speak, which I do not defend, but I think I can account for it in a very simple way.’

‘How do you account for it, Douglas?’

‘I suspect (since we are all to have our suspicions) that, well educated as he is, he is not well born—that he comes of what are called “low people,” and is ashamed of his extraction. He is quite willing we should know *what* he is, and he is certainly a man of remarkable ability; but he is not willing that we should know *who* he is; and I really do not see how I can press him on that point, or urge him to reveal what concerns no one here.’

Gertrude hesitated—looked up at her husband—hesitated again, and then said, with a sweet shy smile,—

‘What if it *does* concern some one here, Douglas? Some one you are very fond of; some one whose destiny you are very anxious to guard?’

‘Alice! you mean my sister Alice,’ he answered hurriedly, while a sudden flush passed over his brow; ‘I cannot think it; I think she would have told me! I am sure she would.’

And a very vivid memory of the long conversation on ‘kith-and-

kin love,' held with Alice as they sat that sweet evening resting among the heather, returned to him as he spoke.

'It was Giuseppe,—no very good authority, perhaps; and I dare say, poor fellow, he thinks love is the hinge on which everything in this world turns,—but *he* assured Lorimer he considered this a case of courtship; he told him that early in the morning, before any one was up except the servants, they walked and sat together in the garden; and that once he came upon Alice violently weeping (Alice, who never weeps), and Mr. Frere speaking to her so eagerly and angrily that he never even perceived Giuseppe's presence; and once more at night—quite at night, he saw them part at the tower-door that leads up to her apartment, and——'

'My love, my love,' said Sir Douglas, very impatiently, 'all that proves nothing. Frere is just the man to melt a girl to tears on religious subjects; and servants, especially foreigners, always see a Cupid in every corner, like the painted border of a valentine.'

'It is Lorimer,' said Gertrude, with hesitation, 'who thinks you should ascertain, for Alice's sake (I have sometimes thought myself that—that she liked him), what and who Mr. Frere is.'

'Ascertain—ascertain! Gertrude, I have but one way of doing things. I cannot beat about the bush, and keep patient watch over trifles, to try and bring my mind to a decision; neither can I, without cause,—without the legitimate interest in Alice which you think may be involved,—ask Frere a single question. But this I will do; I will learn at once, from Alice herself, whether there is a shadow of ground for your supposition; and, if there is, I will make those point-blank inquiries which dear old Lorimer thinks so easy. I should like to put him in my place! Conceive him bluntly addressing Frere thus: "I understand that my nephew's courier suspects you are an impostor; I hope it is not true; account for yourself." Set your mind at ease, Gertrude. I am certain dear Alice will tell me the truth. I am certain she will. She might keep her secret from the whole world, but she would not from me.'

So saying, up went frank-hearted Sir Douglas to the turret-chamber, and knocked at the door. Alice said, 'Come in,' without looking up; she was very busy reading a letter. She slightly started when she saw who was her visitor, and rose directly.

Her half-brother took the little passive hand, pressed it, and sat down by her as she reseated herself. He came directly to the object of his visit. How Lorimer had written about Mr. Frere to Gertrude, and Gertrude had thought it possible Alice might be interested in the very clever and remarkable man who had been

intimate with them now for a long time ; and how he, Sir Douglas himself, would not think it otherwise than natural ; but that there were special reasons why he adjured Alice not to be too shy to tell him whether it was so or not. Her secret would be safe with him ; but he must endeavour to follow up some inquiries respecting this stranger, ' as Lorimer had advised.'

And then, in a very tender and touching manner, he referred to their compact of mutual confidence the day they talked of ' kith-and-kin love,' and he kissed her kindly on the forehead, and petted her as he had done that day.

And after their interview was over, he hurried back to Gertrude, and assured her that Alice smiled at the idea of such a thing as any love betwixt her and Mr. Frere : that she had held many earnest conversations with that preacher, principally about schools and foreign missions,—but never on such a subject as love except once—and that once was not in any way personal to herself ; it was about another person ; she would not tell Sir Douglas then ; she would consider and tell him another time ; these things ought not to be lightly gossiped about. It was something that seemed to give her pain. Indeed, she had admitted that it was about a near and dear friend ; or one she desired to think of as a near and dear friend. She had anxiously consulted Mr. Frere whether she should venture to offer that friend advice ; and he had controlled her in that. She would talk with Sir Douglas about it another time. It had nothing whatever to do with her own affairs.

By a strange coincidence, while they were yet speaking of Mr. Frere, a little note in pencil was handed to Sir Douglas. It said that that individual was waiting for him in the library, having received a painful summons to the bedside of his half-uncle in Shropshire, who had been crushed in the wheel of some cotton manufactory, and that to so urgent a call he could only answer by starting as soon as possible ; that he could not go without wishing Sir Douglas farewell, not knowing exactly when he would return.

Both Sir Douglas and Gertrude went down to the library, to bid him good-bye. He thanked them gravely for their kindness during his sojourn among them, and regretted the interruption made in his usual duties by this, the most sacred duty of all. ' For,' said he sadly, ' I suppose no man ever was so destitute of near ties. I have relatives by my mother's side in Australia, not in very brilliant positions'—and he laughed an awkward laugh,—' one is a petty innkeeper, and the others are making their way as they can, sheep-

tending. There are, however, circumstances which excuse their alienation from me; and I do not like talking of myself. We are all in God's hand. No Christian is fatherless, and the great Father of all sends each of us such fate as He thinks best. I only trust, when we meet again, all may be as bright here as I leave it.'

Saying which, Mr. James Frere gracefully withdrew; and Sir Douglas could not forbear the observation to his wife, how strange it was, that at the very moment they were debating as to inquiries respecting him, he had thus openly alluded to his condition!

'Rely on it, it is as I told you, love. He belongs to people of whom he feels ashamed; some gentleman's natural son perhaps. It is a weakness, but what a common weakness! I am glad, at least, that it should be no vexation to Alice. Her innocent talk on the subject quite set me at my ease. And now I am going to Torrieburn, to talk matters over with Kenneth, who has got the freak into his head of cutting down the woods, and will spoil his place. We shall be very busy all day.'

'We may meet; for I promised to take Eusebia some plants she wants, and a pair of pruning scissors. We shall think our business nearly as important as yours; we are both so fond of flowers.'

As Gertrude left the hall door, she brushed against flitting Alice, who, in her usual cat-like way, was gliding down the walk. Lady Ross smiled and nodded, but passed on. She never expected Alice now to join her, as she did in former inexperienced days.

She had proceeded but a little way, when she found she had forgotten the pruning scissors; they were left in the conservatory.

She set down the little basket of plants, and returned swiftly to seek for them. Eusebia had made such a point of having those scissors to snip dead leaves and straggling roses!

She passed to the further end of the conservatory. There was no way out without returning. Suddenly the voice of Alice, distressed and complaining, smote on her amazed ear.

'Oh, James!' it said, 'how shall I ever bear it! I *cannot* bear it!'

Then Mr. Frere's melodious voice answered, with something between a sneer and a sigh—'You must bear it as other women have done, I suppose. You must not be like the poor old soul who, when led to the gallows, said she knew she never could bear to be hung.'

'Oh! James—James Frere, do not jest with me! what shall I do when you have forsaken me?'

'I do not forsake you. You must make some excuse for a visit

to Edinburgh. I will see you there in some way or other. You are your own mistress, and not a child. Be prudent ; this is temporary ; I have got through a hundred worse chances ! It is lucky you have a key to the letter-bag. Don't attempt to write to *me* till you hear. Perhaps I shall only communicate by advertisement, with a single initial. Good-bye !'

' Oh, James !'

' Do not weep ; be as usual ; you may ruin me by any imprudence. Do you think I am not sorry for you—sorry to leave you ? Is it pleasant to be hunted over the earth as I am ?'

Then Alice—quiet cat-like Alice—with a suppressed cry, threw herself into the arms of the would-be missionary preacher, who, fervently straining her to his breast, muttered the unholy words, ' Curse the fool who has parted us !' and then, putting her from him, and looking steadily in her face with his wild bright eyes, ' You are no mate for me,' he said, ' if you can't bear the gnawing of anxiety as the Spartan bore the gnawing of the fox. If ever you feel tempted to give way, say to yourself, "*I may hang him !*"'

And having spoken every one of these sentences as rapidly as breath could utter them, he disappeared from the conservatory, and in a minute more the sound of wheels, down the approach to the Castle, told that Mr. Frere was gone.

With a deep shivering sigh, and pressing her hand on her side as if she really felt the gnawing pain so recently alluded to, Alice also glided out of the conservatory : and was presently in the garden again, looking out with wistful eyes—at nothing !

And all this time, and for some seconds afterwards, Gertrude stood spell-bound like a statue—the pruning scissors in her hand, and the blood beating at her ears, as it beats in moments of intense anxiety and expectation, or excess of terror.

Was it a waking dream ? Or was that indeed the pious fervent orator, the condemnner of sin in all shapes, the guide and pastor of the young flock entrusted to him ?

As Gertrude passed on her way to Torricburn, she saw outlawed little Jamie Macmichael sitting on the top of the low stone wall, his favourite resort ; he watched the other children swinging their slates and sauntering to school ; but he could not go to school himself,—
' because ye ken, he brak the Lord's day.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CLOUDS.

ANOTHER secret, then, was to burden Gertrude's mind! What could she do? What ought she to do? If pussy-cat Alice had been one grain more genial and confiding, she would at least have endeavoured to draw from her an explanation of that strange, painful scene with Mr. Frere, and advised,—if advice could be of any service.

That there was some entanglement; some betrothal; and that they themselves knew it to be imprudent, unwelcome to those to whom Alice might naturally be expected to confide it; that Mr. Frere was not what he had represented himself to be: all that was very evident. But not so evident what should be done in consequence of the discovery. If Gertrude had concealed from Sir Douglas the faulty conduct of his nephew, how could she feel justified in setting him against his more helpless sister? What if she caused some great quarrel between them? What if, by revealing too soon a secret that Alice might one day herself confide, she made Sir Douglas's half-sister miserable for life? Yet if there was any meaning at all in Mr. Frere's parting sentences they meant that he was unworthy of her; that he had done something which, *if known*,—whether the accusation were true or false,—would be his ruin.

Oh! if Lorimer, the wise counsellor, the steady friend, the experienced mind, were but within hail, and she could consult him! She would not harm Alice; but at least she would learn what it was he had heard against Mr. James Frere. And while Gertrude was thus cogitating in her own simpler way, Alice was also deep in thought in the tower-room. Her obvious depression, her paleness, her starts when suddenly addressed, her wistful watches, in one generally so self-possessed, struck not only Gertrude, who thought she knew the cause, but Sir Douglas, who did *not* know the cause. And up to the tower-room, as he had come many a morning since their talking of 'kith-and-kin' love, came that pitying heart, and, winding his arm round his half-sister's waist, told her in very plain words that he feared she was suffering; was sorry for Frere's departure: was ill; was uncomfortable; or that something had occurred between her and others that had vexed her.

Then, with a little shrinking from the encircling arm, Alice

declared that nothing vexed her: that nothing had occurred between her and others; *not even between her and Lady Ross*, if that was what Douglas meant,—and she turned her eyes on him with well-acted shy questioning. Only she felt a little uncomfortable—a little embarrassed—now that Kenneth was again in the house; and old Lady Clochnaben pained her, and plagued her about those old stories—Sir Douglas knew what they were.

And as he listened with grave attention,—and such utter unconsciousness of her meaning as convinced her that innuendoes would never reach his understanding,—Alice at length bravely spoke out, and saw the soldier's cheek slightly blanch, as he heard her without making any observation, steadily gazing from the turret-window, across the distant hills beyond which frowned rocky Clochnaben.

For,—creeping and soft and tortuous as were the words in which Alice conveyed her meaning, and quietly as her little claws alternately sheathed themselves in velvet, and extended themselves for a sharp grip of the heart with which she was playing—she left with Sir Douglas the distinct and unradicable impression that there had been no delirium in what Kenneth had spoken, in that one respect of his love for Gertrude. That he had certainly proposed for her; that her mother knew it; that all Naples expected it; that every one had known it—but himself.

And then, with timid hesitation, Alice further explained that she had alluded to something of the sort when she told Sir Douglas her more intimate conversations with Mr. Frere had been about 'another person,' not about herself; that consultations had taken place with him whether she should venture on advising a near and dear friend (by which name she ventured to designate Lady Ross), because James Frere was very earnest and unindulgent, and a good deal scandalized at Kenneth's impertinent manner to Sir Douglas's wife. It was the manner of a young vain man who conceived that he had been unfairly used (Mr. Frere thought); and he ought to be checked; and Lady Ross did not check him.

On the night of the family gathering,—that great dinner,—Kenneth had behaved very ill; he had spoken very insolently, while Sir Douglas was talking to Major Forbes in a different part of the room; had even made use of the expression to Lady Ross,—'You think, because I was once so fond of you that you could have twisted me round your finger, that you're to govern me all my life'—and Mr. Frere was excessively shocked; the rather that Monzies of Craigievar was standing by, and must also have heard it. And the same night Kenneth had quarrelled with Doña Eusebia; Lady Charlotte had

been quite frightened by his violence; and Mr. Frere had hoped then that Lady Ross would have appealed to Sir Douglas to lecture the young man; but it seemed all was passed over very quietly.

Mr. Frere had said also he was sure it was a marriage that could not end happily between Kenneth and the Spanish coquette; he had been very severe, and she, Alice, had since felt uncomfortable, she could hardly tell why, but she thought it was from knowing all that was said by Mr. Frere, and her half-brother knowing nothing of it; and she was sure she would be more cheerful and at her ease, now she had unburdened her heart, for *she* had never had any secrets to keep from any one (living so much alone), and it quite weighed upon her spirits the things Mr. Frere had said, and that old Lady Clochnaben, and even Lord Clochnaben,—who usually took so little interest in what passed,—had said, against Kenneth. For of course Lady Ross could not help Kenneth being impertinent to her; and no one who knew the dear half-brother,—the soldier-hero that Alice was so proud to belong to,—could wonder that after knowing him she thought no more of Kenneth; but people's talk was irritating nevertheless, and Mr. Frere had wished Alice to keep utter silence about it, and she never would have spoken of it but for Douglas's questioning her. She would not deceive him by any 'but the real answer' to his inquiries.

From the turret-chamber, stately Sir Douglas went with rather a slower step than usual to the bright morning-room of his wife. She was there playing with her little boy. It was a beautiful picture. Her arms were supporting the merry robust child as he leaned back in them, catching at the long braids of her hair with both hands.

'Your hair is the longest, mamma, of us two; but mine is the curliest! curly, curly, curly, like cousin Kennet's.'

'Curly like papa's.'

'No! 'cause papa's got white hairs in his, and I have no white hairs; curly like Kennet's,' persisted the child.

'Well, curly like Kennet's: and now I am going to pull it all straight and flat like mine.'

'No, no!'

And into the presence of the romping child and his laughing mother, came the father and husband.

He kissed the boy fondly, and set him down again; walked to the window irresolutely, and returned. Then he said to his wife, 'Gertrude, why did you never tell me Kenneth had proposed for you?'

The startled blood crimsoned in her cheek; and for a moment she

did not reply. Then she answered in a low voice, 'There were circumstances I thought might vex you.'

'No circumstances could vex me like your appearing not to have perfect confidence in me. Was it before I came to Naples?'

'No. It was the very first day you asked me to be your wife; almost immediately after you were gone from the Villa Mandórlo.'

'Good God! And you never discouraged his attachment. He must have fancied himself very secure of a favourable answer.'

The hot colour deepened in Gertrude's cheek. Something almost imperious and scornful was in her tone as she replied: 'I never saw anything in Kenneth that led me to imagine he was attached to me. I could not, therefore, either encourage or discourage him. Who has been talking of these matters to you, dear Douglas?'

'Is it true that he quarrelled with Eusebia the night of the dinner party here?' said Sir Douglas, without answering her question.

'Yes. I believe it is true they had a great quarrel. It seemed to pass off more easily than I should have thought possible. They both came to breakfast next day as if nothing had occurred.'

'And you never told me!'

'Douglas'—said Gertrude, earnestly,—'do not vex yourself and me, because I have tried to avoid giving you vexation.'

Sir Douglas sighed.

'I cannot bear to think that there should be reserve on any point between us. There should be none! Man and wife are one.'

'My own dear husband, there shall be none. At this very time I have been debating in my mind whether to tell you of a thing, about ——'

'About Kenneth?'

'Oh! no. It is about Mr. Frere and Alice.'

'Gertrude,' said Sir Douglas, impatiently,—'you have a prejudice against Mr. Frere, because he found fault, and cavilled at matters which—which I dare say you could not control, but which are painful to me. I would rather we did not speak of him. Alice has told me ——'

'She has told you!'

'Yes; she has satisfied my mind as to the terms they were upon and the conversations they held. You were quite mistaken as to their purport. I repeat that it is painful to me to allude to what Frere said,—I only hope—— Oh! forgive me, forgive me, Gertrude! I am speaking as if I doubted you!'

The sudden change of tone—the mingled pain and tenderness of

his manner—thrilled the heart of his wife. She wound her arms round him, and, looking up passionately in his face, she said—‘I do not know what it is that has so disturbed you, but never come doubt between us two, I pray God!’

Then, after a pause, she added,—‘Do not let us talk of Kenneth. Be satisfied that, even if it was a mistake, it was no thought of self, but of you,—you only,—that prompted me to keep silence formerly about him. He is now happily married; to a most beautiful and fascinating woman. Leave them to their happiness—and let them stand outside the gate of ours!’

As she spoke she smiled—that lovely smile whose sunshine irradiated his days; and beckoning the boy again from his playthings, she set him on his father’s knee. Then folding her arms round both,—‘This is *your* share of love in life,’ she said; ‘be content, Douglas, and do not think of other people’s loves and likings.’

And so there was peace. But still a cloud. Sir Douglas thought of Frere’s prophecy, that the marriage of Kenneth and the ‘Spanish coquette’ could not turn out well; and Gertrude, through all her deep and earnest love, felt the mystery of injustice in the sentence which had accused her of having a prejudice against Frere. How Alice had come to talk of Kenneth (for she never doubted it was Alice) she could not conjecture; and how she could have ‘satisfied’ Sir Douglas after the speeches Gertrude had heard from Frere’s lips, was yet more inexplicable.

She imagined a very different explanation from that which had really taken place. She supposed a tearful declaration of interest in that faulty lover, instead of a bitter and perfidious vengeance for his loss.

Ay! bitter. For Alice considered that, but for Lorimer’s letter and Gertrude’s comments on it to Sir Douglas, James Frere might still be at her side; filling her hitherto cold and lonely existence with *her* ‘share of love;’ late come, but to which,—now it *had* come,—she held with a wild and clinging attachment. Her love was like man’s love: a vehement and headstrong fancy. It had neither the patient tenderness nor the innocent trustfulness of woman’s heart.

He was gone forth; gone forth from *her*,—even she scarce knew where, or for how long,—but gone—gone out into the temptation of pleasing and being pleased elsewhere; and when Alice thought of it, that pale and apparently passionless woman could have dashed her head against the stone embrasure of her turret-window, or

thrown herself from it into the deep courtyard below. Anything to still the fierce beating of blood to and fro in her brain, and deaden the thoughts that chased each other there, of the dark-eyed, meager, eloquent man, who had been mocking Heaven and his fellow-creatures by the assumption of a character as much acted as any on the stage!

But Alice governed herself, and was outwardly calm. The fox of an evil secret gnawing at her heart should not find her less brave than the Spartan. If she gave way she might destroy him,—she might *hang him*,—those were his words: no matter what they meant: no matter what he was. She would bear,—and live,—and see him again; and rend in pieces any one who attempted to thwart her, or rival her in his affections.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE MYSTERY OF EVIL.

AND when Sir Douglas and Lady Ross, and Doña Eusebia and Kenneth, were all moving from Glenrossic for a season in town, and were to spend three nights in Edinburgh, to show that strange and memorable city to the Spanish bride; Alice altered her usual course of bidding her half-brother farewell on the steps of the great portal, and returning to her lone turret-chamber, and told him she would accompany the party as far as Edinburgh, and even stay there a few days after they were gone, with an old friend of her mother's.

‘Indeed!’ she said in her slow way, with her odd smile; ‘it’s just one of my silly entertainments to see how Doña Eusebia takes new sights; and besides, I’m getting so spoilt by Douglas, that I believe some day I’ll follow every foot of the way to London, instead of stopping here.’

‘I wish you would, Alice,’ said he, eagerly; ‘it would do you good.’

‘Oh! I’d be lost in your great crowd of people; I’m too simple a body for any very grand or stirring life. Except war,’ she added after a little pause. ‘I often think I should like to see a war. I’d like to live in a tent for one campaign, and see the soldier-life I’ve dreamed of so often.’

And she looked up at Sir Douglas.

The sights of Edinburgh would have made more impression on the Spanish Doña if she had had the remotest inkling of the great facts in history, or known any of the associations which alone can make sight-seeing pleasant. She was not at all afraid of Sir Douglas, but she was a little bored and oppressed by his eager endeavour to impress upon her explanations to which she was perfectly indifferent.

In her opinion the principal sight in Edinburgh, for the time being, was Kenneth's foreign bride. She was the sort of woman who liked to be thought beautiful, even by the waiters who brought in luncheon at the hotel, or the doctor who came to advise about the family health. She was also the sort of woman who set down to her own beauty all notice, even the notice that in some measure was the result of other circumstances.

A certain peculiarity of dress, of walk, of sidelong flashing glances, would have prevented Doña Eusebia from passing along unnoticed, had she been far less handsome than she undoubtedly was; but in her own opinion that notice resulted from the obvious fact that nothing so lovely had ever before passed along Princes Street, or looked from Calton Hill. She could hardly bear to accept the offer of Sir Douglas's field-glass to assist her vision, for fear some chance passer-by might miss the sight of her own bright yet languid eyes, finding that foolish telescopic block an obstacle to his admiration.

She also panted to get from Edinburgh to London. That great arena of conquest, where gaieties, and balls, and operas, would give back her natural opportunities of enjoying life, and leave her little satin-clad feet in peace, unmolested by proposals to take a stroll in glens where the birch-tree shivered, or over the rough heather of unwelcome hills.

It was the last of the three days consecrated to their inspection of modern Athens; Sir Douglas's eagerness had waned in the atmosphere of indifference wherein his communications on all subjects seemed to fade and dissolve; and the group of relatives were rather silently taking their final saunter home, when little Neil, Sir Douglas's son, caused the foremost of the party to look round, by a loud '*Don't, Aunt Alice!*' spoken with childlike impetuosity and anger.

'Neil, Neil! oh, fie, what a voice! said Gertrude, as with a tender smile, but a warning gesture of her hand, she turned to the boy.

'It is Aunt Alice's fault,' said he; 'she gave me such a shake,—such a nasty rude shake to my shoulder, only because I said there was a blind pedlar following us, and he oughtn't to follow us.'

'I didn't think it kind,' said Alice, quietly; 'you shouldn't be unkind to the poor; besides, he wasn't a beggar, he only wanted to sell me some Scotch pearls and stones of various sorts.'

'Oh, let *me* buy,' exclaimed Eusebia; 'let me see these pearls of your country; are they of great cost? Kennet, some pearls, will you?'

The pedlar had retreated some few steps, but Eusebia went eagerly up to him, and remained chaffering awhile as to prices, in her pretty broken English. Kenneth stood smiling at her, occasionally puffing at his cigar. Sir Douglas and Gertrude were still occupied with a tender little lecture to the new bud of the passionate race, who, flushed, beautiful, and only half-convinced, was gazing up in his mother's face for its usual store of pardons.

Sir Douglas looked away to the group beyond; he spoke, with a smile, to Alice:—

'Eusebia has got her pearls in the palm of that avaricious little hand, and we are rid of the pedlar. He has made a good bargain, I am certain; look with what an air he saunters off. More like King Jamie's "gaberlunzie man" than a common beggar.'

For one instant Alice's eyes were fixed on Sir Douglas with that closed glitter of scrutiny which made them so like a cat's. As she lifted them, she met Gertrude's glance, and shrank from it. At that moment the pedlar dropped one of the cases he had been showing, and was proceeding, apparently unconscious of the loss, when Alice and Gertrude simultaneously moved forward to restore it to him. Alice was nearest. She hastily picked up the case, and handed it to the man. As she did so, Gertrude heard her distinctly utter the words,—

To-night, at ten: I am not afraid.'

That evening Gertrude could not help watching Alice. She was quiet as usual. Once or twice she alluded to the journey the others were to make the next day, and the necessity of rest for all. She herself felt fatigued, she said, 'though she had not done much.' As the clock neared the hour of ten, she rose and bade good-night, and glided away.

Gertrude's heart beat hard; she felt anxious and irresolute. That tension of the sense of hearing came to her which comes to us all at such times. She rose, and crossed the room to the open window for air; as she did so, she heard the rustle of a silk dress passing the

door. She sat down by the window, and leaned out. Stealthy and swift, in an instant, from the hotel door to the corner of the street immediately under the window, came feline Alice. The 'gaber-lunzie man' was there. He spoke one rapid sentence, and pointed in a certain direction. Alice crossed the street, and got into one of the carriages that ply for hire; and when Gertrude's eyes returned from following her to where the pedlar had stood, he was gone!

She sat like one in a dream. The clustering lights, low and high, that make the opposite side of the strangely cleft city of Edinburgh look like a dark bank covered with scattered stars, seemed to tremble and waver with an odd life of their own. The soft moon rising beyond the tumult and stir—beyond the grim old castle—beyond the woe, the want, and the wickedness of earth, taking her soundless path through the blue ether, and illumining the clouds as she passed; the murmur of voices, the roll of wheels, the patter of footsteps, the occasional break of so-called 'street-music,' torturing the ear with a vague caricature of some well-known melody—all these things—things visible or audible—seemed to reach Gertrude's senses through a thick, dull medium; that wall of thought which shuts out minor impressions from the inner brain.

Sir Douglas touched her gently on the shoulder.

'My love,' he said, 'if you could only see how tired your face looks, you would follow Alice's example and go to bed.'

As Lady Ross passed to her room she looked into that where Alice should have been. All was still and empty. The moon shone on the white unruffled quilt. No one was sleeping there.

And no one entered there while Gertrude's weary eyes still waited for the sleep that would not close them, for long, long hours; till at day-dawn an irresistible impulse urged her once more to visit that blank place.

All was as it had been the night before. Over the smooth quilt where the moonbeams had then shone, the sunrise was now stealing; but no one was sleeping there!

Had Alice eloped?

No! Alice reappeared in the morning, as if indeed all had been a dream. She passed Lady Ross on the staircase, coming up as the latter went down. She spoke in her usual slow, calm tone.

'Is it not a little early for breakfast?' she said; 'but I will be with you directly. I have been down to the sitting-room to get my bonnet and gloves, which I left there last night.'

And when the chambermaid of the hotel came into Alice's room at the hour she had been desired to come, no difference could have

been perceived between the condition of that and any other of the sleeping-rooms occupied by the party. The pillow was fairly indented, and the covering duly ruffled, and the towels tossed here and there, and the pretty embroidered slippers kicked irregularly under a chair. All looked as if, instead of swiftly passing up, first to the sitting-room, and then to her own, as soon as the hotel was open, and while a few busy servants were about, the 'lady in No. 62' had risen and dressed for breakfast like her neighbours.

Yet Alice had only taken seven minutes and a half to make all these picturesque arrangements!

Sir Douglas, when they parted, embraced her very tenderly; 'and hoped to see her stronger and better when he returned in the autumn to Glenrossie.' But Gertrude shrank more than ever from her alien sister-in-law.

Even supposing her to have rashly married James Frere, and to be irrevocably entangled in the meshes of his destiny, what consummate self-possession and hypocrisy had she not displayed the night of that mysterious interview! Either the pretended pedlar was James Frere himself, or a messenger from that evil man. His height, his air, and something in his step when walking away, favoured the supposition in Gertrude's mind that it was himself; and as to disguise, he that was so clever in all things might well be supposed able to contrive one that should baffle the very keenest observation.

Ailie—whom she had been desired to 'pet!'

The words and the tone in which Lorimer had condemned her 'as a creature full of harm,' echoed one more through Gertrude's brain, as she thought with a shudder of that night.

CHAPTER XL.

THE COURSE OF EVENTS.

IF ever that Tantalus thirst, the love of admiration, *could* be satisfied, certainly it should have been in the exceptional case of Doña Eusebia's triumphal progress through the London season. She 'made *furore*,' as the foreign phrase terms it. A hundred *lorgnons* were aimed at her sparkling face as she leaned from her opera-box, her graceful arms half nestled in scarlet and gold shawls, or Moorish

bournousses of white and gold, black and gold, purple and gold, as the fancy of the evening moved her; for Eusebia had as many shawls and gowns as our vestal and over-rated Queen Elizabeth.

She laid her dresses and wreaths out in the morning on her bed, and studied what the evening should bring forth. She tried on her jewels at the glass, and rehearsed the performances of her *coiffeur*. She tossed a white blonde mantilla over her glossy head, and stuck orange-blossoms under the comb, and tossed it off again, to replace it with heavy black lace and a yellow rose. She sat mute and motionless, contemplating her own little satin shoes with big rosettes to them, and then sprang up and assaulted that bewitching *chaussure*; pulling off the rosettes, and putting in glittering buckles! relapsing thereafter into the mute idolatry of contemplation. She wore her jet black hair one day so smoothly braided that her head looked as if carved in black marble, and the next it was all loose, and wayward, and straying about, as if she had been woke out of a restless slumber, and carried off to a party without having had time allowed her to comb it through.

All the London dandies,—half the grave politicians,—a quarter of the philosophic sages,—and a very large proportion of the Established Church, both High and Low,—thought, spoke, and occupied themselves, chiefly with reference to the fact of the appearance of this Star of Granada. The pine-apples and flowers of every great country house, and the time of the masters of such houses, were at her entire disposal. It was rather a favour conferred than received, when she consented to accept a peer's ticket for some state show, or the opening ceremonies of Parliament. Statesmen sat round her after the cabinet was over: and indeed in some cases were even suspected of hurrying the happy moment of their release from such duties, in order to be in time to ride with her in the Park. Bishops wrote her facetious and kindly little notes. Poets extolled her charms in every measure possible in the English language, including the doubtful possibility of hexameters. Beautiful fresh young girls were presented at Court and made their *débat* in the world of fashion, and the greatest compliment that could be paid to the mothers of such as were brunettes was to say that 'about the eyes,' or 'cheek,' or 'chin,' or 'mouth,' or *tout ensemble*, they had 'a look' of Doña Eusebia.

It was thought the most monstrous reply that ever was made, when handsome Mrs. Cregan, Lorimer Boyd's old friend,—said, with a saucy smile at the supposed resemblance to *her* young

daughter,—‘God forbid! I had rather my girl were ugly, which she is not.’

The only person who approved this speech was poor Lady Charlotte, who was at once puzzled and outraged at the way in which ‘the Spanish she-grandee’ threw her daughter, Lady Ross, into the shade. She fretted over it: she even cried over it; and was only moderately consoled by the argument of the victim herself, who repeated gently, ‘But you know, my little mother, it is the brilliant people who are admired in the world, and I never was brilliant. As long as Douglas thinks me beautiful, I do not care if the whole world thought me so plain that they were forced to turn their heads another way to avoid seeing me as I passed by. Do not let us grudge Eusebia her triumphs; she really *is* so beautiful, and her singing is so wonderful, and she is altogether so unlike anything one ever saw before.’

To which insufficient comforting Lady Charlotte was wont to reply, as she dolefully pulled the long ringlet, ‘Yes, my dear Gertie, I know all that, but she isn’t *real*—and I like things that are real. You are all real, you know. You don’t make nasty little sticky curls with gum and sugar, and plaster them down on your cheek; nor try your things on all day before a looking-glass, nor spend all Sir Douglas’s money in getting new jewels. How ever Kenneth can afford it, I’m sure I don’t know! That butterfly of diamonds she had on her forehead last night cost seven hundred and forty pounds. I know it did, because *I* saw it, and wanted it the day I went to Court, only I was too sensible to buy it; and now *she* has got it, with its beautiful long trembling horns, and wings that lift up and down; and you had nothing on but that necklace of Scotch pearls! I can’t bear it—I can’t!’ And a little whimpering cry was stifled in Lady Charlotte’s embroidered handkerchief, as in days when she wept for Zizine.

But Gertrude smiled; and kissed the faded little woman, and repeated for the hundredth time how dear to her was that necklace of Scotch pearls, Douglas’s gift; and how *he* thought it became her more than any ornament she had—except, indeed, the turquoise chain which was her mother’s own wedding-gift.

To which Lady Charlotte mournfully replied, that she ‘knew all that was said to comfort her,’ but that it really was enough to break one’s heart to see how Eusebia was spoilt and run after!

‘And you are so foolish, Gertie, I must say, though I don’t mean that you ain’t clever in some things; and, indeed, if you sang in her style I shouldn’t at all like it, though *that* is thought very clever,

it seems ! But you are foolish in one way : always talking of Sir Douglas as if he were the only man in the world. Now there are hundreds quite as good judges as he, and they are all running after Eusebia ; which is what provokes me so, I don't know what to do. But I can tell you, my dear, that it don't do to think *only* of what one man thinks ; though I hope, of course, you will always be a good wife, and I am sure you will ; and your dear father and I never had a word in our lives. But still, depend upon it, a man always admires you more if ever so many more men admire you, because my experience tells me *that*, and the fact is, Doña Eusebia *tries* to be admired, and you don't ; and she gets all the men to make a fuss about her, and it is very wrong, and very provoking, and quite frets me down. And, also, I can't see what right she has to be staying here, making conquests of everybody in your house, and making you really—somehow—*second* in the house ! Why can't she and Kenneth go away and live by themselves ?'

This last question was, indeed, more pertinent and to the purpose than the usual maunderings of the owner of lost Zizine. Kenneth had been 'by way of' coming to stay with Sir Douglas till he found a suitable house in town. But week after week rolled away, and the houses proposed to him were either too small, too shabby, in too unfashionable a locality, or too dear—the latter reason being the preponderating one, for nothing would persuade Kenneth that he was not to find a sort of palace, and pay for it at the rate of a common bachelor lodging.

Meanwhile he felt no more scruple as to his dependence on his uncle's hospitality than he had felt all his life in such matters. Doña Eusebia never gave it a thought. And Old Sir Douglas, struggling to be just, to be indulgent, and somewhat repentant of a secret revulsion of feeling at the time Alice confided her false confidences to him about her conversations with Mr. Frere and his Scotch neighbours, took little Neil to sleep in his own dressing-room, that the sleeping-nursery might be given to Eusebia's French maid,—(for even a handsome house in London will not lodge double its expected number of inmates without some little contrivance),—and made the best of all small murmurs coming from Lady Charlotte,—*exigéances* from Doña Eusebia,—and a provoking assumption of a right to expect everything, as a matter of course,—from Kenneth.

But the London season, though certainly tedious, is not eternal. It came at last to an end. Eusebia farewelled her numerous adorers with a coruscation of glittering smiles ; interspersed with the

prettiest sighs, shakes of the head, and promises to see them all again the following spring.

She allowed the Queen's ministers many parting audiences,—and permitted herself to accept a riding-whip encrusted with jewels from the Austrian ambassador.

Grave statesmen forgot their personal comforts in the bewilderment of their regrets, and had to return upstairs and hunt for heavy-handled umbrellas and walking-sticks; which is the awkwardest phase of all the small prosaic realities of life, after an emotional or sensational farewell.

Young attachés smoked treble the number of cigars they were accustomed to,—musing on the blank days soon coming, in which there was to be no Doña Eusebia,—and felt all the more feverish and discontented, in their exaggerated cloud of consolatory tobacco.

Yea, as a crowning triumph, a musical Bishop, obliged for the present to content himself with the imperfect harmonies of earth (*en attendant mieux*), endeavoured to point out to his wife how agreeable the talent of the Spaniard would make their country-house, if his helpmate would propose such a visit; but found an unchristian stubbornness in that worthy lady, as to the point in question.

And in the midst of such regrets, jealousies, and lamentings, the beautiful Eusebia vanished away to Spain!

Nor did she return, to comfort the sorrowing adorers of her brief period of glory, for a very considerable period. What with debts, and difficulties, and laziness, and wilful wanderings; what with Eusebia's detestation of the idea of a residence at Torrieburn; and Kenneth's habit of living *au jour le jour*, and thinking only how much pleasure could be crammed into each; what with (in short) all those small and great impediments, the importance of whose aggregate amazes us when we consider their influence on long lapses of time,—it was full seven years from the date of that London triumph, when Kenneth and Eusebia once more drove up to the stone archway of Glenrossie Castle; bringing with them the only offspring of their marriage,—a little girl as picturesquely beautiful as her mother, but very unlike her; pale and timid, with such a wealth of shy love in her eyes, that they scarce seemed to belong to a mere child, when she looked up at you.

And after the relatives had once more met together, it appeared to Gertrude as if she were receiving a different Kenneth and a different Eusebia. Sharp and querulous was the tone adopted by the beautiful Spaniard; sullen, dogged, and provoking, Kenneth's man-

ner in return. Her beauty endured,—but it was more hard, more bright, more *assisted*, than before. Her coquetry had kept in harmony with that change, and seemed bolder and less harmless. Her child she treated with perfect indifference, except when some sharp reproof as to its way of standing, looking, or moving, escaped her lips. And Gertrude observed, that at such times the little creature would retreat, and put her tiny hand into her father's, and that Kenneth's sulky bitterness to his wife increased tenfold for the nonce. He was evidently unhappy and disturbed in mind; and Eusebia weary of his destiny and its difficulties. Their passion of bygone days had passed away like the light off the hills. They were sick of each other, and their mutual anxieties; nor had they been guests many days, before each made the embarrassing confidence of their griefs against each other, to the person least willing to hear them; namely Gertrude herself.

In vain that sweet peacemaker endeavoured to heal differences. To Kenneth, the preaching of indulgence, patience, and the strength of family ties, was simply 'bosh.' To Eusebia, the expectation of fidelity and discretion, economy, and a willingness to retrieve money embarrassments by residing quietly for some brief years in the only real home her husband possessed, was all impossible nonsense. She looked upon a wife's duties as on a mercantile ledger. The *per contra* had not been deserved by Kenneth, and she did not feel bound to pay it to him. A cold mist seemed to enter with them into the genial home at Glenrossie; but even Gertrude little foresaw the strange turns of fate that were to follow.

Maggie was the first to enter into the storm. The money difficulties which had long oppressed Kenneth, had rebounded upon her, in the tightening and denial of a thousand little resources for her simple pleasures. He had cut down trees she and his father had planted 'at the back o' the hill:' he had raised, and again raised the rent of the mills, which the old miller was loth to surrender and unable to keep up. His letters to his mother had been more like commands severely issued to an imprudent steward, than requests to a parent; and, finally, he had taken his affairs out of the hands of Sir Douglas's factor (as too indulgent), and made over their management to the factor of Dowager Clochnaben. The very man of whose connivance with foes in the matter of the cart-wheel, Maggie and her father had gone to complain, the day Lorimer Boyd discussed their right to do so with his mother.

Nevertheless, Maggie was glad to see her son—her altered son! So glad, that a little of the gladness brimmed over even to Donna

Euseby. She asked him if she mightn't walk with him to the Mill, the day he announced his intention to go there. Her large blue eyes—the only beauty still perfect in her rapidly-coarsening and altered face—looked wistfully into the eyes of her 'ain lad.'

'The auld man's gettin' no that strang,' she said.

Kenneth made no answer.

'And his sicht's no sae gude, as it has been,' she added, doubtfully.

'He seems still to have a sharp eye to his own interest,' laughed Kenneth.

Maggie was a little puzzled, and a little fearful lest, in her pity for her father, she should make him out too infirm for business. She tried an echo of Kenneth's laugh.

'Ou ay,' she said; 'he'll do weel yet; aye reading his ain bills, and settling a'.'

'Well, I'm going to settle a' to-day, my dear mother, and make an end; for things really *can't* go on as they have done for years past.'

Maggie turned, and, walking as they were, she flung herself full on Kenneth's breast.

'Ou Kenneth, my ain lad, my wee bairn, my bonny king o' men, ye'll deal saftly wi' the auld man, for your ain mither's sake! He's a wheen daft noo', wi' sair trouble; and mither's aften laid by wi' rheumatis. Will ye gie me a promise noo, Kenneth? Will ye gie me a promise, my ain bonny lad?'

The awkward coaxing—the attempt (ah! poor Maggie, how rare such attempts in you!) to seem what she was *not*; to seem cheerful, hopeful, and relying, when her soul was fainting with fear—revolted Kenneth instead of touching him. He half returned, half repulsed, her embrace; and said severely:—

'Mother, business is not for women; never let us talk business.'

And then those two—close knit by the holiest of human bonds; sundered by every circumstance of life and its accidents—walked on in silence together to the door of the Mill.

CHAPTER XLI.

KENNETH MAKES SOME LITTLE ARRANGEMENTS.

WITH a slight inclination of his handsome insolent head, Kenneth took a chair opposite the old miller ; who was seated so exactly in the same attitude and in the same spot as on the former occasion of a like unwelcome visit, that he looked like a faded picture of his former self.

Faded—and as his wife expressed it, ‘doited’—with years, drink, and anxiety. She rose hastily, and in a hurried whisper, and with a slight but not unkindly shake of the old man’s arm, she said,—

‘ Mak’ the best o’ yersel’, Peter,—here’s the Laird.’

The old miller turned a stupefied gaze on the new-comer. Some dim consciousness of Maggie’s ill-repressed emotion seemed to strike him, for, addressing her first, he murmured,—‘ What ails ye, Meg? What ails my bonnie lassie?’ Then, feebly staring for a few seconds at Kenneth’s face, he slowly delivered himself of the ill-judged greeting,—‘ Ye’re changed for the waur. I sud scarce hae known ye.’

Maggie moved round to her father’s chair, and laid her large fair hand caressingly on his shoulder.

‘ Its gay hot in they Spanish countries, and he’s a wheen dairker. But ’deed I think he’s a’ the bonnier,’ added she, looking with some motherly pride at the alien son she always called her ‘ ain lad.’

‘ Ye’re blind or blate, Meg, no to see the change that’s come ow’r him,’ testily interrupted the miller ; ‘ but “ ilka corbie thinks its ain bird the whitest,” and that’s a true sayin’.’

Kenneth was looking out towards the path beyond the opened door, and answered only by a smile of evil augury, and a muttered sentence about Maggie not being the only one who was ‘ blind and blate.’ Presently the threshold was darkened by the entrance of the Clochnaben factor. The countenances of the women fell, and the old miller’s brow lowered with a sort of helpless anger. Maggie still stood by his chair, and her gay dress, decorated bonnet, and handsome shawl (gauds which she had put on to walk with Kenneth, and defy the possible presence of Eusebia) made a strange contrast to the dull shabbiness and smoke-dried tints of everything round her.

The factor's greeting to the inmates of the house was, if possible, less courteous even than Kenneth's; but obsequious almost to caricature when addressing 'the Laird.' He made excuse for arriving a few minutes late, on the plea that the Dowager, who was such 'an awfu' woman to contravene,' had insisted, before he set out, on discussing with him the possibility of establishing at Torrieburn Mills a favourite tenant of her own; a man 'warm and weel to do,' and willing to afford very liberal terms for his lease. Maggie opened her great blue eyes with a wide and angry gaze.

'Hoot,' she said, 'it'll be time to think o' new tenants when the auld man's dead and gane. Ye've had word enough from my faither no to come to the mill at a', but send a bit o' writin' when ye've onything to say to him.'

'I appointed Mr. Dure to meet me here!' exclaimed Kenneth, imperiously; 'I can't have business interfered with and delayed for petty quarrels. I'm here to look over accounts, and inspect possible improvements, and I must beg, my dear mother, that you and Mrs. Carmichael will withdraw, and not interrupt us.'

He waved his hand, as he spoke, with a gesture of impatient command, and Mr. Dure rose and opened an inner door which led to a yet more dingy room; and then, as it were, turned Maggie into it, swelling with wrath and sorrow.

There she and her mother sat down in silence; the elder woman rocking herself to and fro with an occasional moan; and the younger keeping her angry blue eyes intently fixed on the heavy panelling that shut out her ill-used father. It was not easy through its old-fashioned thickness to hear much of what took place; and indeed the colloquy was not very long, for Mr. Dure and Kenneth had met merely to arrange matters on a foregone conclusion.

At first, after the formal hearing of accounts, &c., Carmichael's voice was heard apparently reasoning, though in a peevish and plaintive tone; but as the discussion proceeded, his words became shrill and hoarse, and at last they distinctly heard him say, 'I wunna leave; I wunna stir; I'll hae it oot wi' ye, if there's law in Scotland. Yere faither set me here; an' here I'll live, and here I'll dee, in spite o' a' the factors and ne'er-do-weels in Christendom. My Meg will awa' up to Glenrossie and see what Sir Douglas 'll say to sicna a proposition, and I mysel' ——'

'Silence, sir!' furiously broke in the incensed Kenneth, without giving him time to finish the phrase. 'Sir Douglas is not my master, nor master of Torrieburn. I am master here, as you shall find; and if you take this insolent tone with me, you'll have to look

out for a new home a good deal sooner than I at first intended, or Mr. Dure proposed.'

'If Sir Douglas is not yere master, ye heartless braggart,' retorted the exasperated old man, 'Mr. Dure's no mine; and I tell ye——'

Here Maggie violently flung open the door that separated them, and clasped her father in her arms, with sobs and kisses, and vehement ejaculations.

'Ye'll come and live at Torrieburn, daddy; ye'll come and live wi' yere ain Meg at Torrieburn.'

But Kenneth—beside himself with rage at the appeal to Sir Douglas, and the term 'heartless braggart' applied to himself, made it very clear the old miller should *not* 'come and live with his ain Meg' at Torrieburn.

Then poor Maggie, in spite of her gay dress, and vulgar speech, and overgrown proportions of vanishing beauty, became almost sublime.

She ceased, for once, the loud yowling, in which she commonly expressed her grief: she turned very pale, which was also unusual with her; and as her father gave vent to a sort of malediction on her son—hoping that if he went on as he was doing, he might live to lose his own home, and have to sell Torrieburn to strangers to balance his debts and extravagance, and then 'might ca' to mind this bitter day,'—she folded the feeble angry old man to her bosom with a shuddering embrace, and turned with wistful energy to Kenneth.

'Noo, Kenneth,' she said, 'ye'll hear my words this day! Gin' ye deal sae ill and sae hardly by my fayther,—and he auld and sick, and past his best,'—(and here she gave the withered cheek a passionate kiss),—'dinna think I'll see it, and let it gang by! I've luved ye aye dearly, wi' a mither's true love, though ye've made but a sorry son! I've luved ye for yere ain sel', and I've luved ye for sake's sake,—for him yere sae like—(and I wad that yere heart were as like as yere face till him. God rest him, my ain dear mon!) But so sure as ye set yere foot on my auld fayther, it'll end a'; and I'll awa' frae Torrieburn wi' him, and wi' my mither, and ye'll see nae mair o' me! Ye've got set amang fine folk, Kenneth; and ye forgit times whan I nursed ye, and sang to ye, and made ye my treasure, and niver dreeded the shame; but I'll no forgit the days whan I was a nurslin' wean, and sat in the sun, and made castles o' pebbles and moss oot by the Falls, and saw fayther coming ow'r the bridge wi' a smile for me and mither! It was a poorer hame than

what I've had since, but there was luvie in it; luvie—Kenneth—luvie;’ and Maggie’s voice once more swelled to a cry, as, with the passionate apostrophe of Ruth, she added,—‘and sae where the auld folks gang, I’ll gang! and I’ll no forsake them, nor leave them, till God Himsel’ pairts us, as He pairted me frae my only luvie.’

The breathless rapidity and vehemence with which these sentences were uttered would have prevented interruption, even had Kenneth attempted to interrupt, instead of standing speechless with amazement. No answering sympathy woke in his breast. Surprise and a vague impression of his mother’s picturesqueness—as the fair, full-outlined, brightly-dressed golden-haired creature stood up against the brown wainscoting and dark surrounding objects, like a passion-flower that had trailed in among dead leaves:—surprise, and an admission of her beauty,—these were the only sensations with which the scene inspired him.

And when Maggie,—descending from the pedestal of that greater emotion,—became more like the Maggie of usual days, and with loud weeping and clinging besought him to ‘think better o’t, like a gude bonny lad,’ he all but shook himself free; and with the words, —‘I believe you are all mad, and I’m sure I have troubles enough of my own to drive me into keeping you company,’—he left the grieving group to console each other as they best might; and, anxiously resuming calculations and explanations with the shrewd factor of the stern old Dowager, slowly returned with him to that point in their mountain path where their roads diverged, the one leading to Clochnaben and the other to Glenrossie.

CHAPTER XLII.

KENNETH UNHAPPY.

It was true, as Kenneth had said, that he had troubles enough of his own to drive a man mad. And it was true, as the old miller had said, that he was ‘changed for the waur.’ His beauty had not departed, for it consisted in perfection of feature and perfection of form; but it was blurred and blighted by that indescribable change which is the result of continual intemperance and dissipation. That peculiar look in the eyes—weary and yet restless; in the mouth—burnt and faded, even while preserving the outlines of youth; in the figure—when no degree of natural grace, nor skill in the art of

dress, prevents it from seeming limp and shrunken,—all these things had come to Kenneth Ross, and changed him ‘for the waur.’

And more had come to him,—the conviction that his Spanish wife no longer felt the smallest attachment for him; and the belief that, so far as her nature was capable of attachment, she was attached to some one else. Long, angry watches had taught him that, like many of her nation, intrigue and deception were a positive amusement to her, and that the next pleasure in life to being admired was to be able to outwit. A sentiment not, indeed, peculiar to Eusebia, but to the people of her land. It runs through all their comedies, through all their lighter literature, through all their pictures of their own social life. That combination of events which in the novels and plays of other countries is made up of the interweaving or opposition of human passions, is made up, among them, of the pitting of skill against skill. They do indeed acknowledge one other passion, and that is love (according to their notion of love); and a very swift-winged Cupid he is. ‘Who has not loved, has not lived,’ is one of their proverbs; but love itself would be uninteresting in Spain, if he had to go through no shifts or disguises.

Kenneth had never *proved* any more reprehensible fact in Doña Eusebia’s conduct than the giving to one of her adorers a seal, on which was engraved a Cupid beating a drum, with the motto, ‘*Todos le siguen*;’*—and she met his reproof on that occasion with laughing defiance. But the want of certainty did not lessen his distrust. His temper, always imperious and passionate, had become fierce.

Eusebia, on the other hand, was fearless; and she was also *taquineuse*, or *taquinante*; she was fond of teasing, and rather enjoyed the irritation she roused, up to a certain point. She darted sharp words at him with mocking smiles,—as the toreadors fling little arrows with lighted matches appended to them, in the bull-fights of Spain. And she met the result with equal skill and determination. You could not frighten Eusebia. The spirit of a lioness lived in that antelope form, so lithe and slender. If you had twisted all her glossy hair round your hand, and raised a poignard to stab her to the heart, she would not have trembled, neither would she have implored mercy;—but she would have strangled you before you had time to strike!

Their fierce, strange quarrels, that burst like a hurricane and then passed over, were a marvel and a mystery to Gertrude; and the

‘All follow him’ All rally to the beat of that drum.

intervals of tenderness between those quarrels had become rare and transient in both parties. Eusebia had grown moody and careless, and Kenneth was often positively outrageous. And he was unhappy—yes, really unhappy; wrapped in self, and finding self miserable; and thinking it everybody's fault but his own.

Gertrude, then, had the rôle forced on her, so painful to all persons of keen and delicate feelings, of being appealed to,—complained to,—made umpire in those disputes of the soul, that war of mystery, when alienation exists between man and wife.

Kenneth, especially, who had neither reticence nor self-command, would come vehemently into her morning-room, and flinging himself down on the bright green cushions worked with spring and summer flowers, cast his weary, angry eyes round him,—not on, but across, all the lovely peaceful objects with which that room was filled,—into some vacancy of discontent that seemed to lie beyond; and give vent to the bitterest maledictions on his own folly for being caught by a fascinating face, and a few phrases of broken English spoken in a musical voice,—and declare his determination, as soon as he could possibly arrange his affairs and raise money enough to pay his debts, to settle an income on his foreign wife, and never see her more.

It was on one of those occasions (little varied and often repeated) that a memorable scene took place.

The soft pleading of Gertrude's serene eyes; her grave sentences, on duty, and self-sacrifice, and reform of faults; her appeals to his better nature; her allusions to the long, long years before him, if he lived the common length of human life; her hopeful arguments, to him who was so resolved on hopelessness; the innocent cordial smile that irradiated her face while she strove to cheer with words: all these things had a different effect on Kenneth from that which she intended to produce. Those men in whom passion is very strong and affection and reason very weak, have a strange sort of bounded, and as it were merely *external*, comprehension, during such attempts to argue with them. They seem not to listen, but to *see*: to contemplate their own thoughts and the countenance of the person attempting to controvert those thoughts: to receive the impression that they are contradicted; while the depth of their inner nature remains utterly unreachd and unconvinced. To attempt reasonable argument with such natures is like digging through earth and roots, only to come at last upon a slab of stone.

Through the shallow earth and twisted morbid roots of thought in Kenneth's composition, the words of Gertrude had penetrated—but

no farther. While she spoke he was silent; he mused, and gazed, and sighed. He saw *her*—not the drift of what she was saying; and the same wild mixture of anger and preference (which such men as Kenneth call ‘love’) woke in his heart, and maddened him, as in the Villa Mandorlo the day he proposed, and was told she was engaged to his uncle.

Eusebia became as nothing, in his comparison at that moment of the two women. He felt as if he had been spell-bound by some witchcraft, and that the spell was suddenly broken. He rose from the embroidered ottoman where he had been lounging; and as Gertrude crowned all her fabric of half-heard reasoning with a gentle hesitating allusion to the steady self-denying years, and active serviceable youth, of Sir Douglas; and contrasted its practical possibility with the wasted energies of a life of pleasure and extravagance, such as Kenneth had hitherto led, he suddenly and wildly burst through all bounds of decent constraint, and exclaimed,—

‘That is it! *That* is the curse on my life; and you know it! It is because you were taken from me by treachery and falsehood, that I am what I am. I never really loved any woman but you: I loathe the coquetry and paint and affectation to which I am tied. I hate Eusebia! I cast her off; I have done with her. I love you! and you did once love me. Oh, love me still—love me now—*love me* or—I will shoot myself!’

With the last vehement words, and while Gertrude stood up petrified and breathless, he flung his arms round her, and clasped her to his breast in a fierce and passionate embrace.

‘You are mad—Kenneth Ross!’ was all Gertrude could utter, as he suddenly released her at the sound of the door opening behind them. He looked round, still panting with excitement. Sir Douglas stood there; holding the little pale girl with liquid eyes, Kenneth’s only child, by the hand.

‘Your little Effie has been hunting for you everywhere, Kenneth; Eusebia wishes you to accompany her to see the deer that was wounded and taken alive yesterday by the keepers. Neil is waiting for you, cap in hand, at the bottom of the great staircase.’

Except that his air was a shade more stately, and his lip less smiling than was his wont in addressing Kenneth, no one could have told that Sir Douglas’s manner was different from usual; or that a pang, sharp, rapid, and instantly repressed, shot through his heart, and flushed his broad frank temples.

Kenneth did not absolutely say ‘D——n Eusebia!’ but he set his white teeth with some such muttered ejaculation, and grasped

the tiny hand of his little girl so tight when she moved towards him, that they saw the child look plaintively and wonderingly up in his face as the door closed.

Then Sir Douglas turned from looking after them, and looked towards Gertrude.

His eyes wore an expression of wistful questioning ; but Gertrude remained silent and deadly pale. There was a little pause. Her eyes lifted to his, and filled with tears.

‘Gertrude, my Gertrude ! What in God’s name was Kenneth saying to you in such a frantic tone before I opened the door ?’

What was Kenneth saying ? How could she tell his uncle—how could she tell her husband—what Kenneth was saying ! It was a relief (a partial relief) to know that Sir Douglas had not witnessed the wild embrace with which the wild words had been accompanied. He was bending down his stately head, while he opened the door of the bright morning-room, to listen to the child’s timid voice, and her message from her mother.

What had Kenneth been saying ?

Gertrude faltered in her answer.

‘Things are going badly between him and Eusebia,’ she said at length.

Sir Douglas paused again, and looked sorrowfully at his wife.

‘You need not waste so much sympathy upon him, Gertrude. Be sure it is not altogether Eusebia’s fault.’

‘Oh ! do not think my sympathies are with Kenneth,’ said Gertrude, eagerly. Then, embarrassed and miserable, she ceased, and the colour came back in crimson waves to her pallid cheek.

‘Sit down, Gertrude ; why are you standing ? What has moved you so in this matter ? I was coming to speak with you about Kenneth when I met his child on the stair. It is not only with his wife that Kenneth quarrels, but with his unhappy mother—at least, so I gather from her confused explanations. He has given notice to Carmichael to quit the mills.’

‘Oh, Douglas !’

‘The old man has no real title to remain. All that was a matter of indulgence and careless arrangement with my poor brother. But Mrs. Ross-Heaton says, if the old people may not live at Torrieburn, neither will she. She is in a dreadful state (you know how violent she is in the expression of her feelings), and she cannot be brought to comprehend that I have no power to order it otherwise.’

‘She could hardly think Eusebia would consent (if ever Eusebia

settles at Torrieburn) to live *en famille* with Carmichael and his wife. Poor souls !'

'No. And of course Kenneth can do what he pleases, though he seems to have done it unkindly (that factor of Clochnaben's is such a hard man !). But what I was thinking was this : you know the old mill that you called the "Far-away-house," that stands on the boundary-line of what is to be your domain when you are a widow ?'—and here Sir Douglas smiled a tender smile at his young wife—tender, and rather sad, for every now and then that 'gap of years' which had been spanned over for them by the airy bridge of love, haunted his heart, and 'Old Sir Douglas' caught himself thinking what would be, *after he was gone* ! While he lived—even to the last gasp of fleeting life—he would see that sweet face, and hear that gentle voice. But she was young.

Ah ! blind mortal creatures, who for ever contemplate with dread the *one* parting God appoints (foreknown and inevitable), and think so little of all the rash partings we make for ourselves ! The alienations in families ; the once dear names forbidden to be sounded ; the exile to far lands ; the 'drifting' asunder by divers lots in life ; the ambitions, the despairs, the misunderstandings, the necessities, of our human existence. For each parting made by death, it is not an exaggeration to say, that of these other partings there are thousands—bitterer, yea, far bitterer, than death itself.

But Sir Douglas thought of none of these things ; only of his wife, and of the kindly present deed that he was meditating.

'That mill,' he said, 'though not near so good a business as the one at Torrieburn Falls, would give him a certain feeling of home and independence, and as much employment as he is fit for, in his broken state. As to the loss upon it for us, it is nothing ; we will not think of that ; and I will make arrangements by which it shall be included in the dowry settled upon you. You will not turn him out.'

And again the tender smile shone from the noble face ; and Gertrude, already agitated, as she leaned her cheek against his hand could not refrain from tears,—a brief April shower, that had its sunshine near.

It relieved her. She rose once more, and kissed Sir Douglas on the forehead.

'We will go together to Torrieburn, and propose it to him,' said the latter, after a brief pause. 'He is deeply wounded, and not what he used to be, and these moods require tender handling.'

'Tender handling,' indeed, they found it required. Even Sir

Douglas's patience was well-nigh exhausted before he had convinced the obstinate old man that he had little choice as to moving, and that what was now proposed was intended as an act of kindness. When at last it was so understood, the acceptance was made with gloomy resignation, not with gratitude. 'Needs must when the deil drives,' was the final phrase of the Miller; while Maggie, who held passionately to her resolution of leaving with her departing parents, startled poor Gertrude with a speech somewhat enigmatical to Sir Douglas, but not to his wife; delivering herself with broken sobs, of the sentences:—

'Ah! ye may weel seek to mak' amends; but gin ye had married wi' my braw lad yersel' we sud no ha' snt greetin' this day! Ye'd no ha' needed a' they gauds and jewcls that Kenneth has paid sae dear for,—and ye'd ha' been quiet, maybe, at Torrieburn, as ye are, noo at Glenrossie.'

So that even Gertrude's merits were somehow turned to an offence in the eyes of Maggie Ross-Heaton and her 'forbears.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. JAMES FRERE'S ANTECEDENTS.

OF James Frere little had ever been heard by the party at Glenrossie, except one brief missive, recommending particular books for the school, and stating that his uncle in Shropshire having died and left him a little money, he was going to New Zealand. But one morning back came the eloquent preacher, quite unexpectedly; to the intense triumph of Dowager Clochnaben, who had received with a resentment most openly expressed, intelligence of all the suspicions that had so long rested on that injured martyr of society. 'Sift news first, and swallow it afterwards,' was the dictum with which she favoured her son Lorimer, in a letter descriptive of the welcome event and full of taunts at the little wisdom of those who were 'book-learned,' which she thanked God *she* was not.

And indeed Dowager Clochnaben was entirely of the opinion of a young officer whose wife had much talent for verse-writing, and who, when a friend remarked that she would do well to study the best authors, eagerly replied, 'Oh, no, she doesn't read at all: *she says it destroys all originality of thought.*'

'Practical good sense' was what Dowager Clochnaben piqued herself upon; and like most very narrow-minded persons, she somehow held that quality to be incompatible with intellectual occupations. 'Lorimer's very clever, and his writing is considered first-rate,' she would say, 'but I've more practical good sense in my little finger than he has in his head.'

Convinced of her own practical good sense, how could she doubt the correctness of her judgment of her neighbours, or how avoid the profound conviction that they were always wrong if they were not exactly of her opinion?

She had 'taken up with' Mr. James Frere; and she defended him, growled over him, and held him to be her own peculiar property. Her exultation therefore may be conceived when he drove up to the yet unbarred doors of Clochnaben Castle in a light car from the nearest post-house, while the morning mists were yet shrouding craggy peak and purple hill, and lying on the bosom of the sleeping lake. Very cold, very damp, much fatigued, but apparently in high health and spirits; and answering the grim gladness of her welcome with a flash of his brilliant eyes and a hearty shake of her extended hands, while she ordered breakfast and a fire in the large cold room, which she comfortably assured him no one had ever slept in since his departure. That might be true, he thought, for the Dowager was not given to hospitality; and as he entered the apartment, the mildewy, stony, unopened smell smote on his senses in confirmation of her words, and the long thin tartan curtain which protected the somewhat rickety and creaking old door, flew out, full of dust, in the current of air, and met him,—as if it also desired to give him a witch-like greeting on his return.

Little Mr. James Frere cared for mildew or moth, or the damp corners in the ceiling overhead. He warmed himself; he washed himself; he brushed his abundant black hair; he unpacked his travelling valise. He took out of it a large opossum skin, dressed and bound with crimson velvet, a small wooden box, in which lay a specimen nugget of Californian gold; a still smaller box which contained two large emeralds roughly polished but not yet faceted; a thick book containing a journal of adventures in far distant countries; and several loose stones, brown and rugged and dirty-looking, but each with a tested corner that shone like a spark of light, from which he selected three, and laid all these things aside.

Then he took out a blotting-book and a large soiled parchment case, on which was ostentatiously inscribed, 'Rev. James Frere: Testimonials;,' then he carefully relocked the valise, laying at the

top of its contents a case of pistols, and a bearskin-coat that seemed to have known much bad weather; after which he proceeded downstairs, and in a simple careless way presented the valuables he had collected to his hostess with many expressions of gratitude for past shelter and protection, and many a pious text of 'thanksgiving to the Lord,' who had preserved him by land and sea, in perils among savages and perils of the deep, in perils by night and perils by day, and granted him to return (even though but for a season) 'among those he had carried in his heart wherever he had journeyed.'

Then, in the most natural way in the world, Mr. James Frere passed to his journal, his testimonials, and the 'blessed fact' of a grant from Government of a tolerably large sum of money to reimburse losses and expenses he had sustained in the burning of schools he had erected in New Zealand, and other services he had rendered, which had been duly set forth and admitted; and he displayed with pardonable pride the letters he had received from official personages in answer to his applications.

It was a happy accident that brought Alice Ross (unexpectedly also, of course) to Clochnaben, the very same morning that Mr. James Frere had returned. She showed as much pleasurable surprise as the occasion demanded, and no more; only, as she subsided demurely into one of the stiff high-backed chairs with red leather seats, which they had all occupied the first evening James Frere was at Clochnaben, so obvious a shiver thrilled through her frame that he politely inquired whether she felt cold, and while she said her slow deliberate 'No, I thank you, Mr. Frere,' the gleam between her half-closed eyes became a trembling glitter; and with something more of impulse than usual, she put forth one of those little feline hands whose small sharp claws for him were always sheathed in velvet, and murmured 'I'm quite pleased to see you looking so well after the voyage home, and all your—fatigues.'

There was a little—very little hesitation at the last word, and again the trembling shiver seemed to ripple through the slight figure sitting erect in the high-backed chair. But by and by, chatting by the broad hearth as formerly, throwing in the cones and cuttings of fir plantations ('to make the peat burn merrier,' as young Neil Douglas had once expressed it), Alice became quite comfortable again. She accepted with quiet alacrity the proposal that the groom should ride over to Glenrossie to say she would sleep at Clochnaben, and also to notify Mr. Frere's safe return.

But, as things in real life are said to be stranger than fiction, a series of accidental circumstances had already made the inmates of

Glenrossie aware of that happy fact, and of very much more respecting that over-welcomed individual.

Lady Charlotte was on her way for her annual visit to her daughter; with Little Neil as her escort, who was in all the glorious independence of his 'first half' at Eton. The train was very full,—the shooting season having just begun,—and Neil was separated from his grandmother, and put into the next carriage,—nothing loth; it seemed to him more manly, more like travelling alone.

At the last minute, a very feeble, slender, gentleman-like old man, leaning on his servant, was led to the door of the carriage in which the little lad was seated. So trembling and so infirm, that the kindly natured and impulsive boy stretched out his little sturdy arm with mute offer of assistance. The infirm gentleman seemed, however, afraid to trust himself to such support, and after an effort or two succeeded in entering and seating himself in the furthest corner by the window. The servant touched his hat respectfully, and said compassionately, 'I wish you a good journey, sir. I hope if you should be took worse you'll telegraph for me. I'll come up by the night mail in 'no time.' Then, slipping half-crown into the guard's hand, he said, 'Really master's unfit to travel; will you endeavour to keep that compartment from crowding?'

Two other passengers only were in the carriage besides Neil Douglas. They got out at Carlisle. When they were gone the old gentleman seemed to get very restless; his back was turned to Neil; he kept rustling and searching in his travelling-bag for something which apparently he could not find. At first Neil took little notice; he also was occupied. One of his prize-books was 'Rokeby,' and he was deep in sympathy with Bertram. The rustling and searching rather annoyed him, but it ceased at last, and, having finished the scene he was reading, he gave a deep satisfied sigh, and looked up.

To his intense astonishment, the old gentleman with his green shade, trembling hands, and infirm stoop of the shoulders, had vanished; and in his place sat a man of about thirty, with dark bright, watchful eyes, which were fixed for the moment on Neil's face with keen scrutiny.

The boy's heart beat hard and quick. 'Here is a real robber, he thought. But he was a brave boy—as became a son of Sir Douglas; and he retained nerve and presence of mind enough to appear again absorbed in his reading, as he really had been immediately before this terrible discovery.

The stranger slowly turned away that bright fascinating gaze, as a rattlesnake might relieve his prey, and looked steadily out of the

window on his own side. They were nearing a station ; Neil saw him prepare to clasp and lock the bag in which he had been searching. The white beard, the green shade, the comfortable old velvet travelling night-cap, peeped out under his hand as he thrust them all in. His fingers were strong, though long and meager, and on the back of his right hand was a great healed scar !

The train slackened—drew up to the station—stopped. Neil called to the guard—loud, very loud—to be let out. He almost tumbled down the step in his hurry, and put his head in at the window of the next carriage.

‘ Oh ! Mammy-Charlotte ’ (Lady Charlotte had created this graceful substitute for the unwelcome title of ‘ grandma,’ pleading as her excuse that it was ‘ so much more affectionate, being called by one’s own name, you know,’)—‘ Oh ! Mammy-Charlotte, let me come in here and have half your place, or even sit at your feet on the floor. There is a real robber in the next carriage ! He has changed all his clothes, and is turned quite into a different man. There, there, Mammy-Charlotte—look ! that is the man. Don’t you remember, the old, old gentleman who got in where I was ? With a servant who helped him ? Well, he is changed into *that* ! ’

Lady Charlotte gave a little subdued shriek, though she hardly knew why, and called, ‘ Guard ! guard ! ’ in an alarmed voice. The guard was busy ; every one was busy ; but one of the porters civilly said he would call the guard.

‘ Oh ! do—pray do—and you shall have sixpence ; there is a gentleman who has changed all his clothes in the carriage ; pray call the guard ! ’

The guard came, and opening the door, asked which of the ladies had been insulted.

‘ Oh ! dear me,’ said Lady Charlotte, rather shocked at the way the question was put, ‘ nobody has insulted anybody, only a gentleman has changed all his clothes : this dear boy was in the carriage with him : such an escape ! ’

‘ He was disguised, you know,’ interposed Neil, endeavouring to make the matter more intelligible, and addressing the guard ; ‘ he took off all his disguises, and turned into another man ; I assure you he did ! ’

The guard looked puzzled, and rather incredulous ; the bell rang for starting ; the doors were all shut in succession with a heavy bang ; the whistle sounded ; nobody had got out who had not paid for a ticket, and given a ticket. It was nobody’s business if a gentleman had chosen to get in dressed like a pantaloon, and get

out again dressed like a harlequin. The guard nodded an 'all right' to Lady Charlotte, as she vehemently requested that Neil might change his seat and come to her, and the train went off as the boy jumped in.

As it moved away, the pathway behind and beyond the station became visible, and a man, who was slowly walking along, carrying a black travelling bag, looked back at the train.

'There, Mammy-Charlotte! There!' eagerly exclaimed Neil; and he pointed to the receding figure.

'Heaven preserve us all in our beds,' said Lady Charlotte, in a tone of intense terror; 'it is that Mr. James Frere! It is indeed. It is Mr. Frere. What can he be doing? What can he have done—frightening one in this way!' And during the whole of the evening after her arrival at Glenrossie, Lady Charlotte continued in a nervous flutter, repeating over and over again the strange story, and commenting upon it, and making Neil describe 'the dreadful metamorphosis' of which he had been an eye-witness.

'And to think of Mr. Frere, of all people in the world, doing such a thing! He, who used, you know, to be so very tidy, and indeed elegant, in his suit of black, with only of an evening a narrow little lace to the end of his cravat, which I thought quite pretty, and very harmless of course, though unusual. And now to go about like Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves when they were put in the oil-jars! Not that any such thing has happened to him; I wish there could, just to punish him for startling one so; though, of course, as he was but *one*, it oughtn't to be so frightful; and I believe Neil wasn't frightened a bit, and wouldn't have been, if the Forty had been there.'

'I was very much startled,' said the boy; 'I don't know if I was frightened. I certainly thought he was a robber; but he wouldn't have got much by robbing *me*; and I don't suppose he would have killed me, only knocked me senseless perhaps. I am glad it wasn't a robber!'

'But I think it is much worse,' said Lady Charlotte, plaintively, pulling her ringlet, 'because one knows what a robber means, and what he is at, whereas it is so—so dreadfully mysterious about Mr. Frere!'

They all agreed that it was 'dreadfully mysterious;' only Alice boldly said she did not believe it was Mr. Frere at all; that Lady Charlotte had only seen him at a distance, and might be mistaken; and Sir Douglas inclined to the same opinion. Lady Charlotte on the other hand, was confident she had made no mistake. And so

matters rested, till, on the second day after that adventure of Neil's in the railway, the message was received from Alice, as already narrated, to say she would sleep at Clochnaben, and to tell of Mr. Frere's arrival.

Enjoy the pleasant evening, and the long wakeful hours of the wintry night, Alice Ross ! Pile the crackling fir-twigs and the little cones that spout fire and laugh as they burn ! Watch the warm light flicker over lip and brow, and seem to rest itself in those large radiant eyes. Talk of the past, and plan for the future. For in the dawn of the morrow there is the darkness of the thunder-cloud, and in its noon the bursting of the storm !

CHAPTER XLIV.

A CAREER OF SHIFTS AND CONTRIVANCES.

By some curious coincidence, a letter from Lorimer Boyd, entirely on the subject of Mr. James Frere and his doings or misdoings, arrived at the Castle, just as a stranger had inquired for Sir Douglas, and requested to speak to him 'on very particular business,' which business also turned out to be the doings and misdoings of Dowager Clochnaben's *protégé*.

The stranger declared himself to be Mr. Mitchell, a detective from London ; in search of a person calling himself James Frere, but who had gone by various other names, if he was the same man respecting whom Mr. Mitchell had received instructions ; and he was perfectly able to indentify the said James Frere, if he could fall in with him, having known him well during a period of imprisonment which he had suffered some years since for obtaining money under false pretences.

The present charge was for surreptitiously obtaining the baggage and papers of a fellow-passenger who had been left at Jamaica, as was supposed, in a dying state—not expected to survive above a few hours ; but the gentleman's disease had turned out to be an abscess on the liver, which burst, and he recovered, and was on his way to England to prosecute Mr. Frere, and obtain restitution, if possible, of the property taken, consisting chiefly of emeralds and diamonds in the rough ; gold ; and other matters, which could not so immediately have been turned into cash, as to make their seizure in the swindler's possession hopeless.

Information had been received at Liverpool, and the authorities there had been on the look out; but no person at all answering the description given, had been seen at any of the hotels. The matter had been put into Mitchell's hands, and he had traced every passenger that landed from the same ship, except one. That one he, at length, traced to a little public-house in the outskirts of Liverpool; and though the personal appearance of the guest there seemed the very reverse of the man wanted, the detective was much too well accustomed to the shifts and disguises of these *chevaliers d'industrie*, to be the least discouraged on that account. He requested to be shown the room the stranger had occupied; declaring that a valuable diamond ring had been lost or purloined during his stay. The irate landlady told him that he might 'dig the floor up' if he liked; that the room had been cleaned, and moreover occupied, since the gentleman was there; that nothing had been found; that her inn, 'though poor, was honest,' &c. &c.

Mitchell did not 'dig the floor up,' but he made a very minute search in the drawers of tables, and out-of-the-way corners; and though he found little, that little was apparently enough; for with a sharp frown, followed by a whistle and a peculiar smile, he ceased from his labours.

Mitchell found in the grate (which had not since had a fire in it), first, the outer paper of a small box which had been sealed with three seals—two of them tolerable impressions of the initials and crest of the gentleman who had been robbed, the third melted and defaced; secondly, a twisted cord of the long grass of the country, which had apparently tied up a package of that size; then an address label, torn across, with 'Jonas Field, Passenger,' upon it,—the cover of an old letter, which had been used to wipe up ink spilt on the table, and being laid flat, was found to be addressed 'Spencer Carew, Esq.—' and, finally, the distinct impression in an old blotting-book of a very hurried direction to 'Miss Ross, Glenrossie Castle, N. B.'

Which last brought Mitchell to Scotland, and so into the presence of Sir Douglas.

It was James Frere's writing; there could be no doubt of that. Nor any doubt that the sight of it was a great shock to the master of Glenrossie; as Mitchell saw, when he placed the leaf in that brave soldier's hand, and observed the fingers tremble as they held it.

The astute officer looked round the handsome apartment as if he

expected to see James Frere crouched under one of the tables, or emerging from the crimson curtains.

'Miss Ross is one of the family I presume?' said the detective.

'Yes,' said Sir Douglas.

He spoke with such stern haughtiness that the man was rather put out, and muttered something about 'the course of justice,' and being there 'in obedience to orders from his superiors,' and such other phrases, which Sir Douglas cut short by saying, with a sort of sorrowful civility:—

'I am not blaming *you*. The person you are in search of is not here, but I have a letter on the same business from the Home Office in London. I will see you again when I have read through the papers that have been sent me, and meanwhile my servants will give you refreshments.'

The Nemesis who was pursuing Frere had willed that the invalid of Jamaica should be a personal friend of Lorimer Boyd, and that Boyd should be in London, on his way to another diplomatic appointment. Applications for assistance to the Home and Foreign Office were instantly made, and every help afforded; the loss incurred being little less than the loss of a life of savings on the part of one who imagined he was at last returning to enjoy competence and comfort in his native land.

From Lorimer Boyd's letter, about 'the man I always felt sure was a scoundrel and impostor,—' and from Mitchell the detective and his experience,—Sir Douglas gleaned the history of James Frere, as far as any one could trace it.

Who or what he was at the beginning, Mitchell could not say. He was supposed to be the natural son of some gentleman; was well educated; and when very young was discharged from a mercantile house where he had been employed, 'for extraordinary irregularity' in his accounts: on which occasion the head of the firm had severely observed, that he might 'think himself fortunate in being *discharged*—not *prosecuted*.'

He had gone by the name of 'John Delamere' in that employment: he dropped that title for one still more aristocratic, and called himself 'Spencer Carew.'

An advertisement appearing in the papers for 'a travelling tutor of agreeable manners and cheerful and indulgent disposition, to make a tour with a youth in weak health.'—he answered the advertisement as the Rev. Francis Ferney, and referred for his recommendation to 'Spencer Carew, Esq.'

The friend employed to select a travelling companion for the

youth in question, saw Mr. Carew, and received the most satisfactory and brilliant accounts of the 'Rev. Francis Ferney.' They travelled together for a year and a half; and though a good deal of surprise and discontent was expressed at the enormous expenses incurred under Mr. Ferney's management, no steps were taken till the friend who had inquired into his qualifications, accidentally coming face to face with him at the country-house of the youth's uncle and guardian, recognised 'Spencer Carew' in 'Francis Ferney.'

He was prosecuted and imprisoned.

He then appeared on the scene as a Dissenting minister, 'Mr. Forbes,' and was greatly admired for his eloquence; but having seduced one of the school teachers and abandoned her, he had to give up his congregation and try a new path. He became once more a tutor, and travelled in America with his pupil; forged the pupil's name to a letter of credit, and was imprisoned. The next two years were a blank: no one could tell what had become of him; but he cast up at Santa Fé de Bogota, teaching English in the family of a Spanish merchant; was caught in the very act of robbing the strong box of his employer; and would have been again prosecuted, but for the discovery that he had lured the merchant's daughter into a secret marriage, and that the scandal of his prosecution would rebound on a family that had sheltered him.

Was next heard of in Italy, doing duty at the English churches established on suffrance in that kingdom. Was on the point of marriage with a wealthy and enthusiastic spinster, when some one recognised him, and warned the lady that he had a Spanish wife 'beyond seas.' Became much distressed for money in Naples, and connected himself with the worst of characters there. Planned the escape of one of his associates condemned to the galleys for murder: succeeded in assisting his evasion with two of his companions, was pursued and fired upon by the soldiery, dropped from the castle wall into the sea, having received a bayonet wound on the back of his hand; swam to a boat already prepared for the adventure, and escaped to Procida—was not again taken.

Reappeared in England in the employment of a wine merchant; forged his employer's name to a cheque for seven hundred and fifty pounds, and disappeared. Was afterwards traced to Scotland, where it was discovered that he was preaching under the name of James Frere. Disappeared when about to be arrested there, and cast up again in Australia. Travelled with a party of Englishmen who were cut off by the bushrangers, and was strongly suspected of having betrayed his companions, to those by whom they were robbed

and murdered. Took passage for England with the gentleman who was afterwards left in ill-health at Jamaica; pretending then to be a medical man on his way home from San Francisco. Possessed himself of all the baggage and valuables of his infirm companion (whose life at that time appeared to hang on a thread), and arrived once more in England under the circumstances already explained.

It was on the occasion of his adventure in Naples with the galley-slave condemned for murder, that Giuseppe had seen him, swimming,—with his wounded hand dripping blood as he shook it fiercely at his pursuers,—followed in vain by a rowing boat full of chattering and ejaculating soldiery,—till the light skiff that was lying off and on, suddenly spread her sails, and carried him swiftly out of reach.

Sir Douglas then heard, and read, all these particulars respecting the impostor who had lived in such trusted intimacy with the inmates of Glenrossie: the triumphant rival, in religious eloquence, of poor Savile Heaton!

He ordered his horse, and rode, unattended, to Clochnaben Castle: where, instantly seeking the miserable culprit, he taxed him with the facts narrated above; and in stern brief words summoned him to admit or deny that he was the person to whom this wonderful outline of a swindling and vagabond life referred.

At first, Mr. James Frere made very light of Sir Douglas's information. He utterly denied that he even understood to whom or to what his questions referred. But to Sir Douglas saying—'Beware what you do! the detective who has traced you is now at Glenrossie Castle;—the gentleman you have robbed has probably by this time landed in England; if you are indeed the person they are seeking, denial is perfectly hopeless'—his tongue changed; he stood as one transfixed; he trembled from head to foot, and after a faint attempt at bravado, dropped on his knees and besought mercy!

'I have had many excuses: such a hard lot to contend with,' he stammered out. 'You would not surely give me up to justice, Sir Douglas! For God's sake consider! Give me time—give me means of escape: I will surrender all to you—give me a chance for the future! I have been starved—hunted down—persecuted: let me fly—all is here in this very house that belonged to that man;—I never intended to appropriate it! The things were under any charge—in my cabin.'

'Sir Douglas, Sir Douglas, let me escape!' continued he, with increasing vehemence, as the stern contempt visible on the soldier's brow became more and more evident. 'I will repent—reform!—Oh God! consider—your sister—is my WIFE!'

Sir Douglas started, as if he had been shot. Alice crept round to him, pale as a corpse.

‘Let him go, BROTHER!’ was all she said; but she clung to Sir Douglas’s arm, as if it were the arm of the executioner raised to strike.

The soft slender hands locked and unlocked themselves with helpless pleading, turning round his strong and strenuous wrist. The pale face slowly floated, as it were, underneath his, and looked with dreadful appeal into his eyes.

‘You were right,’ she murmured, ‘that night on the hills; but I did not know it *then*—I did not feel it *then*. I have been deceived. But let him go! Oh, let him go!’

And Alice—impassive Alice—laid her white cheek on the panting heart of her proud soldier-brother, and moaned, with the long low moan of a wounded animal.

No answer came from the ashy lips of Sir Douglas. But as James Frere yet endeavoured to mutter sentences of excuse and explanation, and above all to assure those present that they would find ‘every fraction’ of property correct, including trifles he had ventured to present to his kind patroness that morning—that kind patroness proceeded to ‘speed the parting guest’ with the bitter words,—‘Don’t dirty *my* name by setting it between your thieves’ teeth, man! Get to one of your dog-kennels of hiding, out of the sight of honest folk. And the sooner a gallows is lifted on which you can hang, the better for all concerned. That’s my dictum!’

The door closed hurriedly upon him, while she was still uttering her fierce address, and almost immediately afterwards the sound of a horse’s hoofs violently galloping past Clochnaben towers smote the ear. Alice darted to the window, and sank shivering in the embrasure.

‘Ah! whom shall we trust?’ groaned Sir Douglas, ‘whom *can* we trust, if *that* man is a liar, a hypocrite, and an assassin?’

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DOUBTS THAT STING.

WHOM can we trust !'

Where trust is broken, in certain natures there is not only no recovery, but, if I may so speak, no discernment. Such natures no longer distinguish who is loyal and who is false. In proportion to their love for their deceiver, is the belief that none now can be true. When young Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, admits to his grieving half-maddened soul the conviction that his mother is unworthy, he does not reserve a better faith for the purity of Ophelia, or the matron holiness of spotless wives. He sweeps the whole sex into one dark gulf of degradation, and exclaims—

'Frailty, thy name is WOMAN.'

The franker and nobler a man's own nature is, the more is his confusion under such circumstances. How it could come to pass he knows not,—but he, or she, or they, whom he most trusted, whom he thought he had most reason to trust, are false. There is no doubt of *their* falsehood: *ergo*, no fellow-creature can be sincere.

Alice guided her canoe over the shallows and rapids of her half-brother's miserable doubts with a skill which Satan only can supply to his worshippers. What she admitted—with showers of tears and pale gasping lips—helped her through that which she concealed; and though no explanation that could be given could clear her from her own share of dissimulation, she somehow contrived to seem a victim instead of an offender.

'I was like one walking in a dream,' said she, passing her slender hand over her forehead in slow musing accompaniment to the slowly uttered words. 'And then, besides, I was afraid. Afraid for *his* life—and—and—' (here her voice sank to a frightened whisper) 'somewhat for my own. I didn't exactly know all—oh, not the *half* of all! But I knew he had not those scruples that—that most men have; and he had lived—he used to tell me that,—in savage lands, where life is not made of the importance it is here; so many nameless deaths there, and sudden deaths, and none to ask about them—' and Alice gave a little shudder.

'Oh! he wasn't like you—he wasn't like *you*—' she continued; 'he was a man aye fleeing from consequences. But he was not

meant to be what he is; he had his excuses; his strange fate. *I'm not going to excuse him,*' she faltered, as she watched Sir Douglas's listening face; 'you know it was the *good* that took *me*. I thought I had a friend . . . and he took so to the schools . . . and he seemed a sort of brother . . . and he talked of leading souls to God . . . and indeed he made me his own—talking of heaven.

'And there was one other thing; I'll not deny it; I'll not make myself better than I am;' and she laid her trembling hand on Sir Douglas's wrist. 'He seemed to love me so. You know I've been so lone, and so used to see others preferred—and there was love all around me—till I could have cried for envy of Lady Ross. You loved her; and *Kenneth would die for her*; and even Mr. Boyd, oh, *I* could see why it was impossible he could fancy poor me; and indeed Kenneth as good as said it, if I had not seen through it. But this one man loved *me*—this one man loved *me*; and thought nothing of Lady Ross in comparison.'

The wonderful vehemence with which the pale slender creature pronounced the last two sentences! And then seemed to sink away into abject sadness and submission; raised her strange watchful eyes, to peer into Sir Douglas's averted countenance, with wavering gleams in them such as go over the sea on a dull stormy day, while she resumed in a broken tone:—

'And now I must go, I know. You'll expect it of me, and *she'll* expect it, and they'll all look to it; and though I'll not know well where to go, and God knows if *he'll* send for me or let me know what's become of him, still I know I ought—and—and—I'll not ask for much time, and you'll be thinking I have my own independence from my mother; but—but—I've lent a good deal to Mr. Frere—and—if I could have a little time—'

Sir Douglas woke from some absorbed musing which had taken possession apparently of all his faculties, and said almost fiercely, 'Alice, what are you talking of? Do you think I am made of such metal as to drive you forth, just as you are in most need of protection? Stay where you are—stay; but give me time to get over this.'

He rose as he spoke; leaning his clenched hand on the library-table where they had been sitting; still looking down musingly, not seeing the objects there. Then he glanced upwards, doubtful whether to speak a word of better comfort,—to offer perhaps some pardoning caress.

But Alice was gone; softly gone through the half-closed door, with cat-like gliding and gentleness. Only just gone, for the long

ends of the swan's-down boa she habitually crossed over her throat when about to traverse the cold stairs and corridors to her tower-room, were vanishing in the doorway; half creeping, half floating after her; looking as if they were a portion of her stealthy self.

Sir Douglas did not often—as the uneducated express it—‘give way.’ Passionate as he was by nature and temperament, he had a certain dignity which controlled in him the expression of all emotion. But when Alice was gone, he suddenly re-seated himself, and stretching his arms forward on the library-table, he laid his head on them with a groan, and uttered a familiar name in a tone of startling agony.

‘KENNETH!’ was all Sir Douglas said: but if Kenneth could have heard the tone in which his name was spoken,—the funereal *clang* of agony that went through the sound,—perhaps even to him, even to his most selfish nature, the sound might have conveyed a startling appeal.

For feline Alice knew, when she spoke the wily sentence ‘*and Kenneth would die for her*,’ that she had made one long scratch on her half-brother’s heart, the pain of which would so outweigh others that he would think more, and more heavily, of those six little words, than of all the strange revelations in which she had had her guilty and miserable share. Alice did not lose sight of her skilful ‘*tactics*,’ even in that supreme hour. What, indeed, are such *tactics* for, if not to help one in times of danger?

CHAPTER XLVI.

LADY CHARLOTTE PERPLEXED.

BUT Kenneth was little troubled about other men’s troubles. He was full of his own. That fire of thorns which he had chosen to light, the renewal of his passion for Gertrude, burnt with fierce and ceaseless heat: watched by Alice with sly and demure satisfaction, as sure to lead in some way (no matter how) to mischief and vexation for its object; watched with angry sneers by the Spanish she-grandee; who, though no longer herself in love with her husband, had that not uncommon spirit of jealousy which resents losing worship, with all its incense of small attentions, though careless of the worshipper: watched by Dowager Clochnaben,

whenever her visits gave her fit opportunity, with a grim scorn of Sir Douglas's blindness and his wife's abominable hypocrisy; watched even by poor little Lady Charlotte, in a sort of scared, frightened, questioning manner.

'He puts me so in mind, you know,' she rashly avowed to the Dowager, 'of that pretty fable—no, not exactly fable, but heathen story, wasn't it; that dear Neil was reading out loud the other day after luncheon. Of a pagan; no, not a pagan, but a god of the pagans—Pluto it was, I remember, Pluto; and he came when she was quite innocently gathering poppies, and took her away, whether she wished it or no! I forget the name of the goddess he took, but she did not want to go with him; he came upon her quite by surprise. And I happened to look up from my work at the time (I mean while Neil was reading about it) and dear Gertrude was embroidering a *portière* with crimson flowers and white on a green ground, and all her worsted scattered about (so pretty she looked!) and Kenneth had his eyes fixed on her in such a way—in such a way—and his head bent forwards, resting it on his hand, and all his dark curly hair strealing through his fingers as he rested it; and he looked exactly like Pluto. And only that of course such things can't happen *now* (indeed it would be very wrong to suppose they ever *did* really happen; a parcel of wicked heathen inventions, that nobody ought to believe), but I could not help thinking for a moment, that he was just the sort of man to behave that way; and I declare my fingers quite trembled as I went on again with my crochet, fancying to myself Gertrude picking poppies, with no one perhaps but myself within call, and Pluto coming—I mean Kenneth—and carrying her off! Indeed, he's very like a great many of those gods Neil reads about, and they all seem to have been as bad as bad could be.'

'Humph!' said the Dowager, with a grim curl of her upper lip, shadowed now with a slight fringe of stiff grey hairs. 'Humph! There may be heathen stories, and modern stories, too, of that sort; but there's very little carrying off against your will, if you really wish to keep firm footing: that's *my* dictum.'

And with that gesture and firmness habitual to her, she planted her foot venomously on one especial rose in the Aubusson carpet (in the absence of her winter resource, the steel fender) with a precision and force that did indeed seem to defy Pluto and his four fiery-nostrilled steeds to remove her, unless by her own consent, one inch from the spot. Which sudden stamp, acting on the already excited nerves of poor Lady Charlotte, caused her to burst into tears.

The grim Dowager turned her lofty head, as if on a pivot, to contemplate for a moment her weeping friend ; and when the little weak final snuffle in the embroidered and lace-bordered handkerchief seemed to bring the tears to a conclusion, and secure her a hearing, she delivered herself of the comforting sentence,—‘ Most women are fools ; but I do think, Charlotte, that *you* are the greatest fool among them all ; and the greater the fool, the greater the folly : that’s *my* dictum.’

‘ But what *can* I do ? ’ whimpered the submissive Lady Charlotte—‘ what can I do ? ’

‘ Nothing.’

‘ But that’s just what I *do* do ! I daren’t speak to Gertrude ; and beside, I feel so sure of her.’

A snort was the Clochnaben’s sole reply to this last observation—a snort of utter contempt.

‘ And what I think so very unfair, is the way he stays here, you know.’

‘ Who ? ’

‘ Kenneth. He really stays on and on, and comes back, and stays on, and on, and on again, when nobody asks him ! Now he’s here for God knows how long ; for he has put Torrieburn under thorough repair, as he says, and is making a wall and plantation to separate it from the old Mills, and talks of letting it, and I don’t know what else. It is quite heartbreaking ! ’

‘ I suppose if Lady Ross wanted him away, she could get rid of him.’

‘ I don’t believe she could ! I don’t in the least believe she could,’ said Lady Charlotte, eagerly, ‘ or he’d have been gone long ago ! ’

‘ Well, I suppose Sir Douglas could get rid of him,’ said the Dowager, with another curl of the grim grey moustache.

‘ Perhaps, but you see he don’t, and you see it suits Eusebia to stay, if she’s obliged to be in Scotland at all, which she hates.’

‘ If she hates Scotland, she doesn’t hate Scotchmen, at all events.’ nodded the Clochnaben, maliciously ! and the grey moustache stretched to a sort of smile.

‘ What do you mean ? Oh, I know what you mean ; I’m not quite so foolish as you think ; I’ve seen——’

‘ Yes, and you *will* see ; but, however, it’s no business of *ours*.’

Saying which, with a triumphant shake of her vestments, and a somewhat forcible adjusting of her gloves at the wrists, the Dowager ended her visit, and left Lady Charlotte to sigh alone.

‘Why she should think me more foolish than herself, I don’t know,’ was the somewhat wounded reflection of that gentler widow; ‘for, after all, I have observed just as much as she has—all Eusebia’s goings on, and everything else.’

Little Eusebia cared who remarked her goings on. Indeed, she was in that humour which, in old-fashioned phrase, used to be termed ‘flouting’—a mood of mixed sulk and defiance. She had fallen in once more with her half-forgotten admirer of early days, handsome Monzies of Craigievar; but their relative positions were a good deal altered. He was no longer the shy, proud Highland youth, with the first down of manhood on his lip, and the first passion for educated woman in his heart. Bearded, graceful, self-assured, having been a good deal flattered and caressed ‘even in London;’ liked by men, and much admired by women; with a sweet and courteous temper, and great power of adapting himself to whatever set he happened to be in; a first-rate shot, a first-rate reel dancer, a first-rate curler, a first-rate angler, kind to his small scattered handful of tenantry; poor, and not a whit ashamed of the fact,—he had won his way to a good many hearts, both male and female.

He had his ‘melancholy story,’ too—a great thing with the softer sex. He had been married since the days he knew Eusebia; married for a year and a day—no more. Like the ‘Merry Bachelor’ in Rückert’s beautiful ballad, he had wept in anguish over two locks of hair: one, a ringlet as long and glossy as ever was shorn from beauty’s head; and one a little pinch of down, that might be hair or soft bird’s plumage, that lay curled up in the long ringlet, as the little dead head had lain in the dead bosom of that ‘mother of a moment,’ after she had passed away.

Craigievar had been very gentle to his young wife, and very sorry for her loss. It was now five years since he had been widowed, and the elasticity of youth and life overbore each day more and more that cloud-dream of the past; but it had made him still more interesting.

From a philosophical point of view it is of course lamentable to consider that had he been a stumpy, sallow, bleary-eyed widower, his grief would not have gained so much sympathy; but as it was, when he looked sad (and he was still melancholy at times), the fair ladies who watched him set it down to one sole cause. He might, it is true, be only bored at that particular party—or extremely tired with ‘a good day’s sport,’—or perhaps merely have forgotten

his cigar-case ;—but they invariably decided that he was ‘ thinking of his lost Mary,’ and it was quite amazing how many of her own sex were willing to console him

CHAPTER XLVII.

LOVE TROUBLES.

HERE, then, once more was Craigievar ! And here was Eusebia, a beauty beginning fast to fade and harden, and much too shrewd and clever, and dependent on that beauty for her enjoyment of life, not to be quite aware of the fact. Restless, discontented, disappointed, gnawing her own heart at times for very wrath at her marriage, in which, as she considered, there had been so much deception as to Kenneth’s position and fortune ; and in which, as *he* considered, there had been yet greater deception as to her age, and certain circumstances which had caused demands for her hand in marriage to be so little pressed, as to leave her still free when he chanced to come to Grenada to recover health and spirits after his fever in Spain.

Craigievar at first saw Eusebia with more curiosity than interest, as a woman he remembered to have once passionately admired. Then each thought of the other with that strange fictitious emotion—emotion at least which has nothing personally to do with the object that causes it—which most of us feel at sudden meetings with those who *date our lives*. Eusebia saw with a sudden rush the lake, the decorated hut, the early married days when as yet, though vain and coquettish with all, she still preferred Kenneth ; and Craigievar, the days when, still a youth and a bachelor, he had not laid his fair white rose of a wife in the grave, with her cold little bud beside her.

He saw with obvious tenderness pale little Effie, Eusebia’s only child. He too had dreamed he was a father, and woke next morning alone. He thought more of Effie at first than of her mother. Then he perceived how unhappy and angry was the woman he remembered an exulting bride, with her husband madly ‘ in love ’ with her, and all London at her feet ; and something kindlier stole in on his thoughts of her.

But why count the steps of the ladder by which such thoughts climb into mist, seeking better sunshine ? Older than Kenneth,

much older than Craigievar, Eusebia added to all her experience of life special experience of *men*; and the old empire was resumed, and the old songs sung, and boats went out on the lake to the Hut, and returned without Kenneth; and Kenneth not only was not missed, but purposely eluded!

He took it strangely; he was stung, but not jealous. Perhaps in his wild mood he rather wished she would 'run away' from him. He was sick of her, of debt, of life, of everything but the thoughts of Gertrude. He could not trouble his head about his Spanish wife. Strange to say, the very calm that surrounded Gertrude had a charm for him. That calm, the very essence of which was home, and peace, and purity—that calm which, if it were within the bounds of possibility he should be listened to, must depart for ever!

Gertrude meanwhile struggled with a certain feeling of embarrassment in his presence. She cast about how, as Lady Clochnabon had expressed it, to 'get rid of him' without dealing too harshly by a half-ruined man; she had become fully aware of, and alarmed by, the indiscretion (if it were no more) of Eusebia's conduct. Once—once only—tenderly and timidly, she had attempted to warn her. They had been such friends! She had been so fond of Eusebia!

They were in the dressing-room of the latter: who had come in late from the lake with Craigievar, and had been making a toilette more hurried than was her wont. She was clasping in one of her earrings while Gertrude spoke; she turned, still clasping it, with one of those sudden graceful movements, that tossed her veils and fringes round her like dark billows—a demon Venus rising from inky waves. Her beautiful flashing eyes fixed the speaker full in the face; a scornful smile trembled on her short upper lip, and showed the still white and even teeth beneath; her cheeks alone looked a little haggard and fallen under the crimson rouge. She laughed.

'Ha! you steal my bad husband; and you want now perhaps to take my *adornateur*, my *amigo*. Be content with your portion! Do not trouble me. I have already enough sore in my heart.'

And as the long pendant clasped with a snap, she made another rapid volte-face to her mirror, and ceased to speak; contemplating fixedly her own image, with something of sadness mixed with her fierceness that gradually vanished and left her looking—as she intended to look when they should go downstairs to dinner.

Gertrude almost shuddered as she took Kenneth's arm that day to pass to that familiar meal, and started more than once when addressed by others. She was ruminating how 'to get rid of him.'

And how also to get rid of—Eusebia, and the fearful future that seemed to threaten for both !

That very night Kenneth wrote to Gertrude, as wild a letter as ever was written by an unprincipled man to a woman he was enamoured of. To say the ‘woman he loved,’ would be to profane the word.

And Gertrude answered him. She alluded courageously to all the past. She enclosed a copy of the little note of farewell which Lorimer Boyd had taken to him when it was agreed he should leave Naples. She spoke of the faith sworn to her husband at the altar ; and even if such vows had never existed, of her unalterable, passionate, adoring love for his uncle. In conclusion, came a prayer to halt and consider, to save himself and Eusebia from certain misery ; and the information that she intended to go to Edinburgh the following day, and remain there a night : hoping he would see the decency, the *necessity*, of withdrawing from Glenrossie before her return ; no longer mocking the hospitality he received, or paining her by his presence.

Otherwise the day must come—*must* come, when she should confess this torment to her husband ; to her Douglas, faithful and true ; and cast herself on his counsel only,—having done her best through grief and pain to avoid making any breach between him and his uncle, and finding them all in vain !

She could not trust such a letter to indifferent hands. She gave it him as they passed from the breakfast-room. The carriage was already waiting to take her away. As Sir Douglas handed her in, he said with wistful anxiety, ‘I am afraid your chief business in Edinburgh is to see Doctor R——. You have been looking so ill lately.’

Gertrude wrung the tender hand she held, and tried to smile her farewell. Her boy Neil stood beside her husband ; his father’s hand on his sturdy shoulder, smiling with radiant young eyes in the morning sun.

‘God bless them both, and send me peace with them once more,’ was Gertrude’s prayer, as she leaned back wearily in the carriage, the long fir-branches from time to time sweeping against its roof, and dropping a stray cone here and there on the road that led through the noble avenue.

Glenrossie !—dear Glenrossie ! dear home and perfect mate ! Dear, handsome boy, so like her one love of life—her unequalled Douglas ! God bless them, and send her peace. Amen.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ALICE MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES.

WHAT were Alice's green-grey eyes made for, if not to watch? Does not the cat sit apparently watching for ever? watching for what, we know not. Even when there is no chance of mousing,—in the broad day,—do we not see her with fixed attention in her half-closed diamond-shaped orbits; scanning things afar off, near at hand, above and below; ready to pounce on a leaf that flutters down from a tree, a ball of worsted that rolls from old nurse's lap, the tail of a boy's broken kite, or a young bird fallen from the nest in too early essay of its callow wings? Ready to pounce, ever, on the watch. So also was Alice.

All had their plans for that day. Kenneth had hoped—had meant—to see Gertrude. Sir Douglas had made up his mind to speak to his nephew, and urge him to return to Spain. Eusebia intended to pass the day at the Hut (not unaccompanied); and Alice herself was preparing a little basket of provisions for a blind and dying beggar lodged in a cabin between Glenrossie and Clochnaben; from whom a petition had been brought to her by the clergyman who had been called to administer the offices of religion and what help he could afford,—signed with the initials J. F.—‘Jonas Field,’ as the clergyman had understood him to be called.

But Alice had an instinct that something had occurred also at home more than common. She had seen Kenneth give his letter after dinner; she saw Gertrude give the reply after breakfast. While Gertrude was departing, she saw Kenneth step out on the terrace from the breakfast-room, and turn towards the shrubbery, reading as he went. She saw him stop—tear the letter with his teeth, stamp it into the earth, and give way to the wildest gesticulations. She saw Sir Douglas return from putting Gertrude into the carriage, and cross the lawn as if to speak to Kenneth. She saw the latter advance to meet him, casting one hurried look behind, where he had crushed the letter with his foot. Swiftly, noiselessly, she descended also to the garden. She was in time to hear Sir Douglas say, ‘Kenneth, I wish to speak with you;’ and to hear the latter reply, ‘Not now, I can’t; I am going down to Torrieburn: meet me there. I must be there by noon.’

She was in time, though Kenneth turned quickly after he had

seen Sir Douglas re-enter the house, to scramble together the torn papers he had ground down with his heel, and one fluttering bit that was rustling along the hedge of holly, and beat a rapid retreat with that treasure-trove in her hand. She saw Kenneth return to the spot, search, look up as though he thought the wind might have carried the fragments away, pick off the holly-hedge just such another morsel as that she held, and tear it into smaller pieces, which he scattered on the air, and then, pale and moody, turn to the house. She locked herself into her turret-chamber and read with greedy eyes that seemed to eat the very words. She looked from that high window, and saw both Kenneth and Sir Douglas, at different intervals, take the direction of Torricburn, and little sturdy Neil go forth with his own dog and gun, and the careful old keeper.

Glenrossie was empty of its inhabitants! She too could go out: could go and see the blind and dying man, whose initials, 'J. F.' conveyed information full of interest to her mind. But first she would see—would ascertain—would pay a little visit of inspection nearer home.

She was going to Gertrude's bright morning-room.

It was very bright and still. There was no chance of interruption. Gertrude's maid had accompanied her lady; so had Lady Charlotte; but even had there been such a chance, Alice would have easily found some plausible excuse. Was she not working the corresponding *portière* to that which suggested such visions of Pluto's bad conduct to Gertrude's mother?

With gleaming, half-shut eyes, she scanned all the objects round, and rested them at last on a little French *escritoire*, set with *plaques* of old Sèvres china. It was locked—but what was that to Alice? She had a great variety of keys; and French *escriitoires* are not protected by either Chubb's or Bramah's. Nor was she trying this lock for the first time—though beyond reading Lorimer's account of Mr. Frere, she had never hitherto found anything to reward her trouble in opening it. Now she felt sure she would be more fortunate. And the event proved the correctness of her expectations. The papers had been somewhat hastily thrust back the night before, and peeping out from the half-doubled blotting-book, as though absolutely offering itself for inspection, was the insolent, wild, loving letter of Kenneth's, and the rough copy (if rough copy that can be called which had so few verbal corrections, and so completely conveyed the sentiments of the writer) of the torn and gravel-stained answer, with which his blind rage had dealt so hardly in the garden.

Alice nearly danced for joy! She laid the paper flat, compared it with the other, and gave little strange triumphant pats to its outspread surface. Then she sat long in mute, half-frowning, half-scanning consideration; and then jumping up with a suddenness that Eusebia herself could scarcely have rivalled, she crushed all the papers together in her hands, with a wild laugh.

Then once more she smoothed them out, rolled them neatly together, shut the *escritoire*, made a mocking curtsy to the empty chair in which Gertrude habitually sat; said aloud, in a mocking voice, 'Adieu, milady!' and left the morning-room once more to its bright silence; unbroken to-day, even by the boom of the bee, or the outside twitter of the birds; the windows being all closed, and everything marking the absence of that sweet mistress whose happiest hours were passed there.

Then Alice went forth on her mission of charity, and visited the dying beggar. Her visit was prolonged till the day began to wane, for death, she said, at times seemed very near. So when the clergyman arrived, Alice was still there. The man, however, rallied. He spoke feebly of trying to reach his native village, and of dying there. Alice rose and prepared to leave him.

'I will come again, if I can, to-morrow,' she said, in her quiet tone; and looking up in the clergyman's face, as she rolled some papers together, 'I have been reading him something I copied,' she said; 'I thank you for sending me his petition. He knew my old nurse.'

With those words, and a little gentle bow, and tranquil shake of the hand to the minister, she departed; leaving that good old successor of Mr. Heaton gazing after her slender figure with unmixed approbation of her conduct.

'But, indeed, it's not to be marvelled at, in a sister of gude Sir Douglas,' was his half-uttered sentence, as he turned back into the dim cabin, and sat down by the box-bed, in the groping depths of which lay the sick man.

The little light that entered from the open door gleamed rather on the framework of the bed, than on the bed itself: except on the outer edge, where, white and blanched, on the ragged green tartan quilt, lay the helpless and attenuated hand of the sufferer.

The good minister lifted that hand with some kindly encouraging word; as he did so, he remarked a deep-indented scar beyond the knuckles. 'Ye'll have been hurt there, some time, pair bodie,' he observed, compassionately.

The sick man moaned, and answered faintly, 'We'll no murmur

at trouble the Lord sends. I was chased in Edinburgh by some laddies, and whan I was nigh fallin', I caught by a railing, and the spike just wan' into me! It was a sair hurt; but I've had mony blessin's, tho' I'm could now to my very marrow.'

And so saying, the blind man slowly and tremblingly drew in his hand under the dark tartan coverlid, and lay still and apparently exhausted, till the simple minister had departed.

And then the meagre but strenuous hand threw off the faded quilt, and a bandage worn on his forehead, and the keen and radiant eyes of JAMES FRERE looked out at the dying sunset beyond the low narrow door of the cabin; as a wolf's night gleam from its inner den,—waiting for darkness, to prowl in search of its prey.

But James Frere did not want darkness; he wanted light, for he had a great task of careful writing to get through,—and he lit a small lamp and worked at it accordingly.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A SCENE WITH KENNETH.

SIR DOUGLAS had made up his mind, after long reveries, that Kenneth should leave Glenrossie. Gertrude had not spoken to him on the subject. He dared scarcely argue the matter openly to his own soul, far less to her, but he was not the less resolved.

They met, then, at Torricburn. Kenneth had shot some birds on his way, and was carrying his gun with a listless gloomy brow, as if there were no pleasure left in that or anything else for him. He had also obviously taken repeated draughts from the flask of whisky he carried at his belt; and the dull glare which Sir Douglas loathed to see in his eyes, was already perceptible there, though it was little past noon.

They sat down on some felled timber, and Sir Douglas went straight to his point.

'Kenneth,' he said, 'I have resolved to speak to you about leaving Glenrossie. A great deal has come to my knowledge since first you and Eusebia made your home with us, which had I known it at first, would perhaps have prevented me ever proposing to you to come there.'

Kenneth drew a long draught from the whisky-flask, and, in a

thick angry voice, he muttered, 'Has Gertrude—has your wife—been complaining of me to you?'

'No, she has always taken your part—always endeavoured to explain away or conceal differences between you and Eusebia, as well as those events which—which, perhaps—' and here Sir Douglas hesitated, 'which, most assuredly, I had better have known at the time they took place.'

Again Kenneth had recourse to the flask, and said, with a bitter laugh, 'It was not I, at least, who kept you in ignorance of them.'

Sir Douglas felt the blood flush to his temples; he strove to be calm.

'No, Kenneth; it was not you. I cannot doubt, however, that they were kept from me for a good motive. We cannot undo the past; what I have to think of is the future. It is repugnant to me to live with you on other terms than those of the most loving cordiality and freedom from restraint. That cordiality—that free affection'—Sir Douglas's voice broke a little—'cannot exist as it did. It may return, Kenneth—God grant it may!—but feeling as I do, and knowing what I do, there is change enough to make me wish a further change, and that is——'

'Pray go on, my dear uncle; go on, old fellow! Don't mind me!'

Kenneth was rapidly becoming more and more intoxicated.

'That change is that we shall part, Kenneth, at all events for the present. I have loved you, in spite of all your faults; I will endeavour to assist you to the last, in spite of all your imprudences: but I will not live with you in the same home, because——'

'D——n it, speak out, and say you want to part me and Gertrude, and have done with it. Afraid of me, eh? a little late in the day, uncle, a little late——'

A drunken, hollow laugh followed this speech.

Sir Douglas rose, trembling with suppressed passion.

'Kenneth,' he said, 'do not break all the links that bind us together. However confused habitual excess may make your intellect, however small the place which love and—I will not call it gratitude—love and memory of what we *have* been to each other may hold in your heart, respect the purity of others! Respect the spotless name of my wife. Better men than you have loved in vain, and borne it, and stood faithfully by a second choice.'

'Parted!'—continued he, almost as vehemently as Kenneth himself;—'you were parted before ever we were united! Parted, boy! Gertrude and I are one soul; and you part now with us *both*, until

—if ever that better day come in your perverse heart—you can reason and repent.’

So sternly—in all their many discussions—had loving Sir Douglas never spoken to his nephew before. Never,—to that spoiled and indulged idol!

It maddened Kenneth. What little reasoning power increasing irritation and increasing intoxication had left him, seemed to forsake his brain in a flash of hot lightning. He looked up, cowering and yet frenzied, from the felled tree where he sat, to the stately form with folded arms and indignant commanding countenance above him. He leaned one arm on the lopped branch to steady himself, and answered; swaying from side to side, speaking thickly, hurriedly, with an idiot’s laugh and an idiot’s fierceness.

‘Pure?’ he said, ‘pure! Oh, yes, pure and spotless; they are all pure and spotless till they’re found out! I loved in vain, did I? Talk of *my* vanity: what is my vanity to yours, you old coxcomb? Parted! You *can’t* part us. I told you at Naples, and I tell you now, that she loved me—me—*ME*! and nothing but fear holds her to you. I’ll stay here, if it’s only to breathe the same air. Parted! Part from her yourself—tyrant and traitor! Part from her for ever,—and be sure if I don’t marry your widow, no other man shall!’

He staggered suddenly to his feet, levelled his gun full at Sir Douglas as he stood, and fired.

In the very act he stumbled and fell on one knee: the charge went low and slanted: part of it struck Sir Douglas on the left hand, and drew blood.

The shock seemed to sober Kenneth for a moment. A gloomy sort of horror spread over his face. Then the idiot laugh returned.

‘I haven’t—haven’t killed you. You’re winged, though, winged! Stand back! Don’t tempt me,’ added he, with returning ferocity.

Sir Douglas lifted the gun and flung it out of reach: then he spoke, binding his handkerchief round his hand:—

‘You have not killed me. Go home, and thank God for that. You have not made my son suddenly an orphan—as *you* were when first I took you to my heart. Oh! my boy, my poor lost Kenneth, what demon spell is on your life? Pray to God! *PRAY!*’

And with the last broken words, a bitter cry ending almost in an agonised sob, went up to heaven, and resounded in the dull ear of the drunken man.

Many a day afterwards, and many a night in dreams, Kenneth saw that pale, sorrowful, commanding face, and the stately form erect over his grovelling drunkenness as he held by the branch of

the felled pine, vainly trying to steady himself and rise from the half-kneeling, half-leaning posture into which he had fallen. Many a lonely day in the sough of the wind in those Scottish woods, he heard again the echo of that 'exceeding bitter cry' wrung from the anguish of a noble soul, and making vain appeal to his better nature.

'God gives us moments in our lives when all might change. If he could have repented then ! If he could but have repented !

Many a day he thought of it when Sir Douglas was no longer there, and he could see his face no more.

There was a dreary pause after that burst of anguish, and then Sir Douglas spoke again :—

'Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. When I can think further of this day, and more calmly, you shall hear from me. Farewell Kenneth !'

The stately vision seemed to hold its hand out in token of amicable parting, as Kenneth raised his bloodshot stupefied eyes. He did not take the hand ; it seemed too far off ; reaching from some better world. He crouched down again, laying his head prone with hidden face on the rough resinous bark of the lopped tree.

As he did so, something for a moment seemed to press gently on the tangled curls, like a human touch ; which passed away, and left only the breath of heaven waving through them ;—but as it passed, a sound, as of a heavy human sigh, melted also on his bewildered ear.

A fancy haunted Kenneth that the hand of Sir Douglas had rested for that moment on his head, as it had lain many a day in his boyhood and youth ; and that the sigh was his also. But these might be but dreams !

All that was real, was the utter loneliness,—when, after a long drunken slumber, he woke and saw the sun declining, and heard the distant music of Torrieburn Falls, monotonously sweet—and the clear song of the wooing thrush,—and looked languidly towards the house of Torrieburn, with its half-hidden gables, gleaming through the trees.

Then the words came back to him clearly and distinctly,—'Come no more to Glenrossie. Stay where you are. Eusebia shall join you. Farewell, Kenneth ! FAREWELL !'

Was it all a black dream ? A black, drunken, delirious dream ?

No : it was real,—that bitter farewell ! All was over for ever, between him and his uncle Douglas. All was over for ever !

Somehow, suddenly, Kenneth thought of his mother. For a man knows,—if no one else on earth pities him,—his ~~MOTHER~~ ^{MOTHER} pities still !

The drunken head bowed once more over the fallen tree, and half murmured the sacred name.

Poor Maggie, what easy showers of kisses and tears would have answered, if she had known it ! But Maggie was away,—‘ ayont the hills,’—swelling with her own share of sorrowful indignation at Kenneth’s conduct, and vainly trying to reconcile the old miller and his rheumatic wife to their new abode.

‘ Cauld and strange ! ’ ‘ Cauld and strange ! ’ was all that rewarded her efforts.

The young and the eager love change ; they enjoy it. The old and the weary abhor and suffer under it.

Peter Carmichael sate and shivered in the sunshine, on the bench by that alien threshold ; and his faithful cross old wife stepped ‘ but and ben,’ with a murmur and a moan, half of pain and profound discontent, and half of sympathy in her ‘ auld man’s ’ troubles.

CHAPTER L.

ALICE IMPARTS HER DISCOVERIES.

THE next day was the Sabbath. Peace shone from the clear autumn sky, and glorified the common things of earth. Birds sang, flowers opened wide, streamlets and falls seemed to dance as they rippled and rolled in the light. The freshness of the morning was over the cultured fields ; the freshness of the morning was over the barren moor ; the freshness of the morning sparkled in the dewy glen.

Neil had promised his old nurse to ‘ step into her sheiling,’—his mother being absent,—and go with her to church ; for which the old woman was already pinning on her snowy cap and best shawl, and smiling, not at herself but at a vision of Neil, in her glass.

Alice asked, sadly and demurely, and very anxiously, if she might walk with her half-brother, and if he would mind setting out half-an-hour ‘ too soon,’ as she had something very particular to say to him. Sir Douglas consented. They walked in utter silence great part of the way, as far as the ‘ broomy knowe,’ where Alice had first talked with him of ‘ kith-and-kin love.’ There she halted, and there they sat down : there she reminded him of that day !

Then—in a sort of frightened, subdued whispering voice—Alice said,—

‘I know well that, since that day, I myself have forfeited much of my claim to brother’s love; though it seems to me even now that I love you better than all—ay, even better than *my dream* of wedded love! But whether I have forfeited or not, I feel I cannot bear others should deceive you; and I’ve brought to this place what must be shown, though it wring my heart in the showing, and yours in the reading. It’s all I can do, in return for your mercy and indulgence to *me*. All I can do in return is to prevent your being deceived by others. God knows what we are all made of. I’ve not had an hour’s peace since I picked up this letter. Kenneth trampled it under foot just as you went to speak with him yesterday morning; and I was out gathering flowers, and then I thought it looked so unseemly in the garden-ground; and then as I gathered it up I saw—I could not help seeing, some strange words; and at last—at last—oh! Douglas do not have any anger with *me*—nor much with *her*, for it’s my belief there is witchcraft round her, and none can help loving her that see her.’

Sir Douglas looked strangely into Alice’s eyes as she handed him the gravel-soiled, earth-stained papers. It was Gertrude’s writing; of that there could be no doubt. And what was not Gertrude’s was Kenneth’s.

Oh, God of mercy, what was to come to-day, after that yesterday of pain?

Sir Douglas lifted his gaze from his half-sister’s pallid face, and looked up to the serene heaven before he read. ‘Thy will be done. *Thy* will be done,’ said the trembling human lips. And hard was the struggle to echo the words in the shuddering human heart.

Much has been said and written of the tortures of the Inquisition, and the cruelty of those who could look on and yet not show mercy. But what are physical tortures to torture of the mind? What ‘grand Inquisitor’ ever looked on with more stony indifference at unendurable suffering than Alice Ross, as she watched the flush of colour rise to cheek and temple—fade to ghastly paleness—and big drops stand on the marble brow; while the breath of life seemed to pant and quicken as if suffocation would follow?

But even she started, at the long moan which burst from his overcharged bosom, as her half-brother closed his eyes, and leaned back on the bank.

He had read it all. *ALL.*

Not in vain had Alice Ross paid her long visit to the blind beggar with the indented scar on his thin right hand. Not for the first time—no, nor for the hundredth—was that hand exercising its un-

equalled skill at imitation and forgery; nor that apt and tortuous brain devising schemes of ruin or vengeance on those who had offended him.

The passionately torn letter, gravel-stained and soiled, had apparently its corresponding half, also gravel-stained and soiled; and carefully had Alice's light heel and clever hands sought the very spot where Kenneth's mad passion had ground it into the earth in the morning. But the half that corresponded in form, altered the whole sense of the letter. The sentences referring to her love for Sir Douglas were apparently addressed to Kenneth. Her notice that she would be in Edinburgh read like an appointment to him to meet her there. Her allusions to the necessity—'if all this torment continued'—of confession to her husband, barely escaped the sense that she had to make a confession of a return of his unlawful passion. The letter only stopped short at a clear implication of sin. Perhaps even the two bold accomplices employed in its concoction felt that on *that* hinge the door of possible credence would cease to open.

All was left in doubt and mystery, except that to that bold avowal of guilty love an answer had been secretly delivered, conveying all the encouragement it was possible to give; referring to the old days of Naples; to the little note of adieu, telling him they were parting 'for a time, not for ever,' that it was 'better for him, for her, for *all*.'

The passage that hoped he 'would see the decency, the necessity, of withdrawing from Glenrossie,' was a little fragment wanting in the torn sheet.

No one could read the letter and still think Gertrude a true and holy-hearted wife; though those who chose to give her 'the benefit of the doubt,' might believe sin only imminent, not yet accomplished.

The part that was forged was not more stained or spoiled than the portion which was no forgery. Every word fitted naturally in every sentence. If ever human being held what looked like proof incontrovertible leading to miserable conviction, Sir Douglas held it that day, as he sat on the wild fair hill with all the peace and beauty of nature spread around him.

He rose at length, and held his right hand out to Alice; his left was bandaged and in pain. She put her slender fingers forward to meet his touch, and felt the icy dampness that speaks of faintness at the heart. He cleared his throat twice before speaking, and then said with an effort: 'I believe you have done right. Be satisfied that you have done right: it was a *duty* not to let me remain in ignorance.'

Then he stood still ; looking wistfully out on the lovely scenery ; the lake below, the hills above, the grim rocks of Clochnaben, the valley where smiled Glenrossie, the speck of white light that denoted where lay the Hut, with a still tinier spark of scarlet reflected from the flag, set up on the days they meant to visit it.

‘Fair no more ! pleasant, never, never again !’ he murmured to himself, as he gazed ; and then he turned slowly to Alice.

‘We must go on to church. Say nothing of all this to any fellow-creature. Be as usual ; I shall, I trust, be as usual. This is the battle of LIFE.’

At the gate of the churchyard were the usual groups of men, women, and children ; uncovered, greeting with smiles and respectful curtsies their beloved chieftain and landlord. In general he had a kind word or sentence for each and all. He tried twice, but his voice faltered, for they inquired in return after ‘her Ledyship at the Castle,’ and the answer choked in his throat.

His boy Neil turned into the gate, holding the old nurse by the hand, and carrying her huge brown leather psalm-book, wrapped in a clean white cotton pocket-handkerchief. Neil gave it gently into her withered grasp, with a kindly pat on her shoulder, and turned to accompany his father to their usual seat. Sir Douglas passed onwards as in a dream ; his face was very pale.

‘Papa’s hand, that he hurt yesterday, seems to pain him very much,’ Neil whispered to Alice. She nodded demurely without speaking. It was not right to speak in church. Neil ought to know that.

Sir Douglas sat, very pale, still, and stately, by the side of his handsome little son ; and many a kindly glance wandered to the pew when the boy’s voice full, sweet, and strong, rose to join the psalmody. The young laird was the idol of Sir Douglas’s tenantry. ‘He was just what auld Sir Douglas himsel’ had bin ; a thoctit stouter, may be, but just the varry moral o’ him.’

So the service went on, till all of a sudden Sir Douglas gave a deep audible groan. They were reading the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, and had come to the nineteenth verse :— ‘Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.’

Young Neil started at the groan, and clasping his father’s hand in his own, looked anxiously up in his face, and half rose from his seat, as though expecting him to leave the church from illness. But Sir Douglas sat still, his eyes steadily fixed on the minister.

It is strange that women who have been falsely accused, never

think of drawing consolation from the fact that the holiest of all the women whose lives are recorded,—the one woman who was permitted to be as it were the link between earth and heaven,—according to the transmitted history of the Christian religion,—had to endure *her* share of earthly shame!

Nor only that, but that a lesson as to the fallibility of all human judgment lies wrapped in the written account of the conduct of her husband Joseph. He was a 'just' man. A good man; merciful, affectionate, anxious to do that which was right in the sight of God; anxious to bear himself fitly and with all indulgence to his neighbour. But his human mercy extended only to 'putting her away privily.' He would not put her to public shame, though his own trust was broken. That was the sum of all; till the angelic vision made clear that she who was condemned in the sight of man, was the chosen weak vessel for the mercy of God; through whom the restored purity of redemption was to come to all the erring children of Adam.

As Sir Douglas listened, *he* also leaned to the side of that incomparable mercy which would spare shame. He knelt a little longer in final prayer than usual before he passed out into the sunshine; and greeted the assembled groups with a degree less of abstraction, still holding Neil by the hand.

Arrived at Glenrossie he shut himself up in the library and wrote.

His letter was not long. It was addressed to Gertrude, and enclosed the gravel-stained papers which Alice had given him. He wrote the address and sealed it, with a firm unshrinking hand; but long he sat and gazed at it after it was written, as if in a painful trance; and when he rose from the table where he had been writing, he felt as though threatened with paralysis, and stood a moment holding by the brass-bound table, fearing he might fall.

Then he passed to his own dressing-room and sent for Neil.

'Neil, my boy,' he said, 'I am going to London. I am in great pain.' He paused, unable to proceed.

'My dearest father! yes; I can see you are in pain. You will have some surgeon? How did you do it? how *could* you get hurt?' And the innocent boy stooped with his eyes full of tears, and kissed, with a tender little kiss, the bandage over the wounded hand.

'I may be away more days than you expect, dear Neil. You will do all as if I were here—lessons: conduct: care in shooting: all—won't you?'

'I will, father; I will. Trust me, father. You can trust me,

can't you?' and the boy smiled, with his sweet candid eyes fixed full on his father's face.

'Yes—yes! O God! let me trust you, my son, if I never again trust any other human being!' And to the consternation of Neil, Sir Douglas flung his arms round his son's neck and sobbed like a child.

In the morning, while the grey dawn was breaking, and Neil lay yet wrapped in happy boyish slumbers,—quick, rolling wheels once more sounded softly along the great fir-avenue; the caressing feathery branches that had bent over Gertrude's departure the previous day, brushed over the roof of the carriage that now bore her husband from home. The squirrel leaped and scampered up the brown stems, and the scattering cones fell to the earth, and lay on the dewy grass in silence.

Great was the silence in Glenrossie that day: the master had departed!

CHAPTER LI.

GERTRUDE THINKS HERSELF SUPERIOR TO SIR DOUGLAS.

THERE is a grievous moment in the lives of many who love humbly and sincerely, and think little of themselves; a moment of strange contradiction of all the previous impressions of that love; a dethroning, as it were, of its objects.

No longer better, wiser, greater than all other moral creatures: no longer the infallible guide, the crown and glory of life; loved still, it may be, but loved in a different way.

Something of splendour departed, we know not where: something of security vanished we know not why: such is the change that comes at such times. It comes to men in the first consciousness of their over-estimation of some fair syren whose song has only lured them to the rocks and shoals of existence. It comes to women whose love has bordered on adoration, when they feel compelled to mingle *pity* with the regard they bestow on their husbands.

When Gertrude read—with strained and amazed eyes—the letter put into her hands that morning, she pressed her lips to the signature with the kiss of passionate pity one bestows on a wounded child.

'Oh my poor Douglas! my husband!' was all she said. But in

that one brief grieving sentence, they seemed to change positions for ever. He stood lower: she stood higher, Never could *she* have been so deceived! Never, though all the stars in heaven had seemed to shed their light on the deception, could *she* have accepted as against him the wretched forgery of proof he had accepted against *her*. Never!

Poor Douglas! Ay, poor indeed. Beggared of trust, and hope, and belief in human nature; for if he doubted *her*, in whom could he believe?

The sick pang at her heart increased. She rang, and ordered preparations for instant departure; and then she once more sat down to re-read the strange lines penned by that familiar hand. That hand which had clasped hers at the altar; which had detained her with its warm, gentle, almost trembling grasp, when first they stood together on the threshold of her new home at Glenrossie; detained her that he might murmur in her ear, before she entered, his hope that she would be always happy there; his wife,—his own for evermore!

She was a girl then. She was a young matron now. If it were not for her handsome schoolboy, Neil, the years had flown so swiftly that it might seem but yesterday she blushed through that bridal hour of love, and heard that welcome HOME; that blessed sentence,—spoken in music, since spoken by *his* voice.

And now, what had he written? How *could* he write so? Poor Douglas!

‘Gertrude,’ the letter said, ‘I am spared at least the anguish of explanation, by being enabled to enclose you these papers. Your own letter and ——’ (there was a *blir* here, as though the name ‘Kenneth’ had been begun and effaced) ‘*my nephew’s*.’

‘I endeavour to do you justice, and believe that his conduct at Naples and many combining circumstances, made you think it best to reject him,—and accept me.

‘I feel certain that no worldly calculations mingled with the arguments of others, or your own thoughts, when you so decided.

‘You could not then perhaps test the strength or weakness of your heart. You mated your youth with my age. A gap of long years stretched between us! I have the less time remaining to suffer from the remembrance of my bitter loss.

‘Whether my life of loneliness to come, shall be longer than I could desire, or brief as I wish, you will see me no more. I shall endeavour to devote myself to the service of my country, as in earlier days. Not in unmanly despair, but in submission

to God, I trust to spend what measure of the future He may allot me.

‘For you—you know me too well to doubt my desire that all this should pass without open scandal; and without that bitterness which assumes a right of vengeance for irreparable wrong.

‘I am gone. I will not part you from your son. I have seen what that suffering is in other women; that tearing out of the heart by the roots. You will doubtless be much with your mother; but when Neil’s holidays come, you will meet him at Glenrossie, and remain with him there. I shall see him—but not now. I make no condition; except that you avoid all explanation with him. Let him—at least in this his happy boyhood—know me *absent*, not *parted*, from home ties. Let all around you think the same.

‘I have hesitated to add anything respecting the *cause* of our separation. I will only say that it is a dreary satisfaction to me to believe that, seeing what your first step towards sin has brought about, you will never take a second.

‘In leaving you Neil, I leave a hostage against all possibility of actual dishonour.

‘DOUGLAS ROSS.’

Then followed a very few hurried lines, apparently written after the letter was concluded; the ink pale, the sentence blotted immediately after writing.

‘Gertrude—I find it impossible to close this letter,—my last letter to my wife,—and not say ——’

There the lines ended that were decipherable! Pore over them, and turn them which way she would, she could not make out more than the two words ‘selfish love.’ Selfish? was it his, was it Kenneth’s? Was he relenting to her, even while he sealed her sentence of exile from his heart? Was there LOVE in those blurred lines, love of which she was cheated, by their being so defaced? Or had some phrase of warning,—too severe, in his merciful view of her case,—occupied that last fraction of the fair white sheet of paper, so full of suppressed accusation and stifled regrets?

It was with a shudder that Gertrude thought of Kenneth, and gazed once more at his mad letter. Gazed, too, at the answer, so ingeniously fitted in with its mosaic of forgery! She could not doubt who had betrayed her to this misery. Alice! Alice, and (if it were possible to believe he were again within hail) James Frere! He had been convicted of forgery. He had etched and imitated for Dowager Lady Clochnaben in the early days of their intimacy with

a skill which had been the marvel of all who beheld it. She did not for one moment doubt what had happened : and, strange to say, the more she thought of it, the less miserable she felt. It was all so transparently clear. She had only to get to Douglas—(poor Douglas!)—and explain it, and say, ‘Half this letter is indeed mine, but the other half is a forgery ; how *could* you believe in it ? ’ and then—then—she would be happier than ever !

Happy, with the weight off her heart of all past partial concealments (all attempted for *his* sake—his own dear sake,—to save *him* pain) ; happy with the embarrassment of Kenneth’s presence removed for good ; happy, *alone* in the lovely home of Glenrossie with her husband ; without Alice,—cruel, cunning, cat-like Alice.

Only her husband, and her boy, and her mother, and true friends ! Oh ! happy ; happy.

CHAPTER LII.

ON WINGS OF HOPE : A JOURNEY.

EAGER, almost elate, dying to be in Sir Douglas’s presence ; in his kindly clasping arms ; Gertrude tied her bonnet-strings with hurried trembling fingers ; and telling her maid that very important business had called Sir Douglas to London, and that she was to follow him with Lady Charlotte, sent that shrewd abigail to Glenrossie with the message, and continued her preparations without a word to her mother of the dreadful letter, only that ‘important business’ called them to town ; and with an effort at gaiety, which even to that simple-minded parent seemed strange and hysterical.

Then she suddenly bethought her of the proof—the easy proof of forgery, which lay in her desk at Glenrossie, the first rough copy of her letter to Kenneth—not meant, indeed, for a rough copy, but cast aside after writing it, as containing passages, reasoning with him, which were as well omitted. She *must* get that letter. The delay of getting that must be borne, and then she would set out for their London home, and see her husband. Lady Charlotte might wait for her in Edinburgh ; it was needless fatigue for that fragile traveller to go to Glenrossie and back. Gertrude would go alone.

She did go alone. Pale and excited, she passed by the good old butler, who had already settled in his own mind that things looked

'no canny' in his master's hurried departure. She asked for Neil as she fitted by, and was told he was out with the keeper; then, swift and noiseless as a ghost, she reached the door of her own bright morning-room and opened it wide.

It was already occupied.

There in the sunshine—witch-like and spiteful—smiling a smile such as ought never to wreath a woman's lips, sat Alice Ross, curled up and lounging on the green ottoman, Kenneth's favourite resort. She did not immediately perceive Gertrude; she was smiling that evil smile at the maid; who stood in her shawl and bonnet as she had arrived, nervously pinning and unpinning her large pebble brooch, and staring down at Miss Ross, who had just finished a sentence of which the word 'packing' was all that reached Gertrude's ear.

The maid uttered an exclamation at sight of her lady, and curtsied; and Alice, startled into attention, rose, or rather leaped, with feline activity, from her feline attitude of repose.

The pale mistress of Glenrossie Castle looked steadily at her false sister-in-law, on whose lips the odd smile still flickered with a baleful light, and who, having risen, continued mutely standing, neither bidding good-morrow, nor otherwise acknowledging her presence.

'This is *my* room,' said Lady Ross, as, unable to restrain her impatience to possess herself of her letter, she advanced to the *escritoire*.

The proud sentence of dismissal changed Alice's smile to a little audible laugh.

'True, but ye were not expected here,' she said; with slow Scotch emphasis on the '*not*.'

Then, as Gertrude feverishly searched, and searched in vain, for the purloined paper, and turned at last (paler than ever) to conscious 'Ailie,'—convinced through whose misdoing it was no longer there—the half-sister of Sir Douglas, with mocking bitterness added,—

'Kenneth's off for Edinburgh, like other folk. It's hard to be parted from what one loves.'

There was a world of emphasis in the creature's last slow sentence.

'God forgive you, Alice Ross!' said Gertrude; 'Douglas never will,—when he knows all.'

'That will be very unchristian,' said the imperturbed and imperturbable Ailie. And with a repetition of the audible little laugh, she tossed the ends of her bonnet together, and glided out of the room.

and was down the corridor and up the stair and away to her own tower-chamber, before the heavy shivering sigh from Gertrude's heart had died away in silence.

It was perhaps with a wistful excuse for the great and honest anxiety which weighed on his mind, that the old butler came to the door and knocked, though it still stood half open, inquiring doubtfully whether her 'Leddyship' would not take some refreshment after her journey.

Gertrude did not at first hear or heed him. She stood with her eyes fixed on the escritoire, and murmured to herself half aloud, 'Oh! what shall I do?'

'Trust in God,' said the old servant.

He had seen three generations now of this house, and considered himself as much a part of it as the very trees on whose rough branches, when Sir Douglas and Kenneth were boys, their cold stepmother had hung the two dogs.

Trust in God.

Then Gertrude looked up, and said gently, and rather absently,—
'I am going to London. Tell Neil when he comes in.'

'When will ye be back, my Leddy?'

The question nearly broke down her resolve to be calm. She faltered out the words, 'I expect we shall be back in a couple of days or so.'

WR. The old man looked doubtfully and compassionately at her, and left the apartment. After a minute's pause Gertrude left it also. She looked back as she quitted it. That lovely room, with all its chosen treasures!

The sentence that spoke of her coming to it only as a visitor—that sentence in Sir Douglas's letter which bid her 'meet Neil at Glenrossie during his holidays'—rose in her mind with spectral force. She chased it away, and smiled—a quivering, tender smile. Soon she would see that dear husband, and convince him! Soon all would be well again. They would yet chat and laugh together, by winter hearth and summer sunshine, in that room!

Eyes followed her as she departed. The eyes of keen, watchful Alice, peering from her tower; the eyes, faded, wrinkled, and kindly, of the aged butler, who had seen Old Sir Douglas a cradled child! The eyes of her maid, who, neither better nor worse than others of her class, had been listening to all sorts of malevolent gossip and evil prophecy from Alice Ross, and had been prepared for thorough belief in that gossip, by inspection of Sir Douglas's letter before it even reached her lady's hand.

For they all had an instinct that something unusual was going on. Why should Sir Douglas write, when in an hour or two her mistress would be home? Why should Lady Ross herself sit half the night before she went to Edinburgh, writing, and forgetting to undress—though her weary maid coughed and sighed, to remind her that she was waiting in the ante-room, the candles burning low, and yawns becoming more and more frequent? Why?

‘Sir Douglas and milady were certainly going to part, only my milady didn’t wish it, because of her reputation; and Mr. Kenneth was at the bottom of it all.’

How very quickly did the household arrive at this portentous conclusion, which Sir Douglas imagined could be kept a secret from every one!

A secret! You may keep a secret from your bosom friend; from your father confessor; but *not* from the man who stands behind your chair at dinner, or the female who ‘lays out’ your dressing things at night. Your looks are their books; your thoughts their principal subject of speculation: your actions, in *esse* or *posse*, the main topic of their mutual discourse.

Neil dined and supped (most discontentedly) alone with Alice, whom he profoundly disliked, that day; and wondered with the keeper, during the rest of his time, whatever could have happened to his father’s hand?

And the old keeper shook his head solemnly, and repeated for the fiftieth time that it was ‘maist surprisin’, for gude Sir Douglas hadna a gun oot wi’ him the morn.’ And it was more suprising still that he had given no account of the accident to any one.

And so they all chatted, and wondered; while Gertrude travelled ‘on and on,’ like a princess in a fairy tale, till at length on the morrow the haven was reached, and she stood on the steps of her London home, and entered it.

Yes; Sir Douglas *had* arrived the night but one previous. He was out just then, but he was *there*; in their usual abode when in town.

And Gertrude also was there! She drew a long breath, a happy sigh; and pressed her mother’s anxious little hand with a languid weary smile of joy.

She had only to wait for his coming in; and then all would be well.

Only to wait.

CHAPTER LIII.

WAITING FOR JOY.

GERTRUDE waited. At first patiently, pleasantly; her soft glad eyes wandering over familiar objects; all diverse, but all covered by the misty cloud of her one thought.

Then she grew restless; and rose, and walked to and fro over the rich carpet, with that pain at the temples and in the knees which comes to nervous persons who have waited too long in anxiety and suspense.

Then she became exhausted and weary. All day long she had not broken her fast; she could not eat; something seemed to choke her in the attempt. She grew paler and paler, till at last Lady Charlotte's increasing alarm took the shape of words, which framed themselves into a little plaintive scolding.

'Now Gertrude, I can see that whatever news Douglas has sent you isn't pleasant news; and I don't want to interfere between man and wife, or ask what you don't offer to tell me, though I've been wondering all day what has happened; and whether he has put his money into a lottery, and lost it; or what; for I know nothing new has happened to Kenneth. Not that Douglas is a likely man to put into a lottery, but still, however superior he may be, he might choose the wrong number, you know, and draw a blank, and you would have to retrench. Indeed, I once knew a man (a very clever man and a friend of your father's) who was quite ruined by putting into a lottery. He chose 503, and the winning number was 505—only two off!—so very distressing and provoking! However, he taught drawing afterwards, in crayons and pastels, and did pretty well, and people were very sorry for him. But what I wanted to say was this—that you really *must* eat something, if only a sandwich, or a biscuit; for I am sure Douglas will be quite vexed when he comes in, to see you looking as you do. And you won't be able to talk matters over with him, or settle what should be done.'

The last of these wandering sentences was the one that roused Gertrude. True, she would not be able to talk matters over, if she felt as faint and exhausted as she did then. She would talk something. She rang, and ordered biscuits and wine, and smiled over them at her mother, who, still dissatisfied, pulled her ringlet, and even bit the end of it, (which she only did in great extremities.)

saying, 'I wish you would tell me, Gertrude: I do so hate mysteries.'

'So do I, my little mother; but this is Douglas's secret, not mine;' and with a gentle embrace, Gertrude hushed the querulous little woman. Then turning with a sigh to the window,—'It is getting very late,' she said, 'Douglas must be dining at his club. Call me when he comes, and I will lie down on the sofa meanwhile.'

The fatigue and agitation of the day, and the nourishment, light as it was, that Gertrude had taken, together with the increasing stillness and dimness of all things round her, soon lulled her senses into torpor, and suspense was lost in a deep, quiet sleep.

Lady Charlotte dozed a little too; but her fatigue was less and her restlessness greater. She was extremely curious to know what had occurred, and was mentally taking an inventory of the objects in the room, with a view to a possible auction—if Sir Douglas had indeed ruined himself by staking his all on a lottery ticket—when she heard the rapid wheels of his cab drive up to the house, saw him alight, and heard the door of the library open and swing to, as he entered that sanctum.

Lady Charlotte glanced towards her daughter, who was still sleeping profoundly. It was a pity to wake her. She would go first by herself and see Sir Douglas, and he could come by and by to Gertrude.

In pursuance of this resolve, she went gently down the broad staircase; somewhat haunted by recollections of days when Eusebia used to sail down it dressed in very full dress for the opera, outshining her hostess sister-in-law alike in the multiplicity of her gowns and of her conquests, and preceding Gertrude, more simply attired and leaning in dull domesticity on her husband's arm.

'And now only suppose he *is* ruined; it will be worse even than Kenneth!' thought the perturbed mother, as she pushed the heavy green baize door forward, and came into Sir Douglas's presence.

'Oh, dear!'

That feeble ejaculation was all she could utter, as she stood, extremely frightened and perplexed, pulling her long curl to a straight line in her agitation.

For it seemed to her that if ever she saw the image of a ruined man, she saw it now!

The table was loaded with parcels, with parchments, with letters; a hatcase and a swordcase were at one end, and an open paper, looking very like a deed, or a lease, or a will, by the heavy silver inkstand at the other.

Sir Douglas himself, pale as death, except one bright scarlet spot

at his cheekbone,—with a grieved determined look on his mouth which she had never seen there before,—was apparently giving final directions to his man of business; and as that person bowed and retired, he turned, with what seemed to poor Lady Charlotte a most haughty and angry stare, to see who was intruding upon him at the other entrance.

Her alarm increased, when with a sudden fire in his eyes (looking, she thought, ‘so like Kenneth!’) he recognised her, and without further welcome than—‘Good God, Lady Charlotte!’ motioned her, as it were, to leave him.

The fragile widow had a little access of peevish courage at that moment, for she thought, if this was the mood of her daughter’s husband, he might disturb and alarm his wife beyond measure. He might really make her quite ill after all her fatigue. Her poor tired Gertrude! It would be so very unfair!

Lady Charlotte was a weak woman, but what strength she had lay in love for her daughter; and though rather afraid of Sir Douglas at all times, she was least afraid when it was a question of Gertrude’s well-being. Like the lady in the old ballad, who saw the armed Ghost:—

‘Love conquered fear,’

even in her. She was, besides, rather angry with her stately son-in-law for being ‘ruined,’ (which was her *idée fixe* for the hour,) so she said very bravely, ‘I do hope, Sir Douglas, before you go up to Gertrude—whatever you have to tell her——’

But Sir Douglas did not wait for the end of the sentence. He said, in a sort of hoarse whisper, ‘Is she *here*?’

‘Of course she is here. Good gracious, you might be sure she would come directly; and what I wanted to beg——’

Again Sir Douglas interrupted. He advanced a few steps, and stood close to Lady Charlotte, looking down on her, as she afterwards expressed it, ‘most frightfully,’—while the hot spot vanished out of his cheek, and even his lips grew ashy pale.

‘You have come to plead for her?’ he said, in a low, strange tone. ‘Do not attempt it. It would be utterly in vain. My resolves are taken. Tell Gertrude—tell Lady Ross—that all is over for ever between us. She may rouse me to wrath, she may rouse me to *madness*, (and he struck his breast wildly with his clenched hand as she spoke), ‘but the lost love, and the vanished trust, she will never raise to life again while *my* life lasts. Make no scandal of lamenting here, among servants and inferiors. Take her away. Do not speak. I will hear nothing. Do not write. I will read no letter that alludes

to her. So far as lies in my power her very name (and, thank God, it is not a common one) shall never be uttered before me again.'

He paused, and leaned his hand on the table among those scattered papers, to which Lady Charlotte's terrified and bewildered eyes mechanically followed. Then he resumed, in a stern, unnaturally quiet tone,

'All my arrangements are made. This house will be sold, as soon as they can conveniently be carried out. I leave it in a few minutes for ever. I have spoken to—to your daughter—about Neil's holidays at Glenrossie. She will have told you. There is war now threatening for England; and chances——' (of death in battle for men desirous to die—was the thought; but he did not give it utterance). He broke suddenly off. 'I must wish you farewell, Lady Charlotte! I wish you farewell!'

Whether he vanished, or leaped out of the window, or went through one of the library doors like any other mortal Christian man, Lady Charlotte could never have told to her dying day. Gasping with terror and surprise far too real and intense for the little bursts of weeping in the embroidered pocket-handkerchief, which were the ordinary safety-valves of her emotion; dimly comprehending that it was a dreadful quarrel between him and Gertrude—not ruin of fortune, or rash speculation, that caused this bewildering outburst—the poor little woman tottered away, and crept back up the handsome staircase desecrated by memories of Eusebia's triumphs, as far as the first landing.

There she sat down to consider what she could possibly do next. Was she to wake Gertrude only to tell her all this? Her tired Gertrude, who lay slumbering so softly? Surely not! She must think; she must reflect; she could not yet even re-enter the drawing-room. She 'didn't know what on earth to do.'

So Lady Charlotte sat on the landing in the half-lit house, leaning on a great roll of carpeting which was deposited there, 'the family being out of town.' And the under-housemaid, passing that way, saw the lady sitting thus strangely on the stairs; and not knowing what else to say, asked 'if she would like some tea?' Upon which Lady Charlotte, in an abstracted and despairing sort of way, replied, 'Oh! dear no; never again—*never!*' Which the under-housemaid told the housekeeper; and thereupon the two or three servants at the town-house came to quite as rapid a conclusion as the servants at Glenrossie. 'Sir Douglas had come up to London in *such* a fluster; and had gone away without even saying good-bye to my lady, though she was in the drawing-room; and my

lady's mother had been seen sitting on the landing of the stairs, and had said she never would drink tea again !'

What *could* that mean but family disruption, separation, perhaps divorce ?

And all this while Gertrude slumbered on. Oh ! how tranquil and peaceful and child-like were those slumbers ! No warning dream mingled with their stillness. She heard no sound of the rushing train speeding along blank lines, and under dull echoing tunnels, in the pale moonlight, to reach the great sea-port of England. No echo of the beating ocean plashing and heaving under the dark steamer, whose powerful revolving machinery was to carry away that grieving, angry heart,—that deceived husband ! She saw no vision of her Douglas sitting alone on the dim deck, leaning over the ship's side—

‘ Watching the waves that fled before his face,’

and seeing nothing there but his own sorrow.

She slept :—as children sleep, through a thunderstorm, or with death busy in the house ; all outward things sealed from her perceptions. Gently barred and shuttered out,—even as the common light was barred by the closing against it of her smooth white eyelids.

And long after her mother had crept from the landing, up the second short flight of bare uncarpeted steps, into the room she had left, she still slept on : Lady Charlotte watching her meanwhile with fear and trembling ; wondering what she should do, and how comport herself, when Gertrude should open those serene orbs and ask if Douglas had yet returned ?

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW JOY VANISHED.

THAT moment came. The sweet eyes slowly lifted their long curtaining lashes, with the transient bewilderment in them, of one who has slept in a strange place ; and then the sweet lips smiled, and with a look of rest and refreshment in her countenance, she sat up and spoke the dreaded words :—‘ My darling mother, how fagged you look : is it very late ? *Is Douglas come in ?* ’

In a moment more she had started to her feet : for Lady Charlotte

looked vaguely at her, trembling excessively, without attempting to answer the question.

‘Mother, dearest mother, he *is* come, and you have seen him. My foolish Douglas! Where is he? Did he frighten you? Oh! it is all so base and bad, I wanted to wait till I had seen him, till all was well again, before you were pained by knowing! Where is he?’ and she passed swiftly to the door as if to go to him.

Lady Charlotte flung her arms round her daughter.

‘My darling Gertie, you must take patience; you must, indeed: he wasn’t fit to be spoken to: he wasn’t really quite in his right mind; he was raving.’

‘Mother—do not detain me—I *must* see my husband! I had rather he struek me dead, than not attempt to meet him now and try to convince him of the truth. I know him! I know him! I know his inmost soul. He will hear *me*, if he will hear *no* one else. You don’t know what has happened.’

‘Gertrude, my love, my dearest,—it is of no use—you—you can’t see him—he is gone!’

‘Gone where? Gone,—rather than meet me Gone back to Scotland?’

‘Oh! dear me, I’m sure I don’t know where he is gone, or what he is at! He was quite as wild as Kenneth at Naples, only not so rude (but much more dreadful!) and he said all sorts of shocking things about wrath, and madness, and not trusting, and never seeing you again; and, that he wouldn’t hear me speak of you,—and wouldn’t read anything written about you,—and that your name should never be uttered before him as long as he lived!’

‘And you let me sleep on!’

Lady Charlotte scarcely heard this agonised exclamation, but continued hurriedly—

‘And he said this house was to be sold; and that all his arrangements were made (whatever that might mean), and that he had told you already about Glenrossie and Neil—and——’

‘Oh, mother! oh, mother! oh, MOTHER!’ burst from Gertrude in such increasingly wild, hysterical, ascending tones, as thrilled through poor Lady Charlotte’s very marrow.

‘You let me sleep on through all,—mother! How could you let me sleep on? You have destroyed me! How could you? how *could* you? Oh, God!’—and she vehemently disengaged herself from Lady Charlotte’s clinging embrace.

Then Gertrude had to bear what many persons in the days of affliction have to bear,—namely, that in the midst of their great

anguish, some lesser anguish from one they love or are bound to consider, breaks in and claims their attention from their own misery.

For Lady Charlotte, thunderstruck at the tone of bitter reproach, and the gesture that accompanied it, from her ever-loving daughter, burst into tears on her own account; and kept sobbing out,—

‘Oh! dear! oh, good gracious, Gertrude! that ever I should live to hear you speak to me in such a voice as that! your own mother! Oh dear me, if your poor father could have lived to hear such a thing! It isn’t *my* fault that you’ve married such a violent man; *all* such violent men they are! Kenneth isn’t a bit worse in reality than Douglas; and Neil—yes, even dear Neil *has* his tempers! And I did mean to wake you as you bid me; but he alarmed me so, and went away at last like—like a flash of lightning from the sky! And after all he may come back again, just as oddly; and you shouldn’t speak to me in that way! Oh! dear! Oh dear me! Oh!’

‘No; I ought not. You must forgive me, little mother; don’t cry any more—don’t; it bewilders me! You do not know what has happened.’

‘Well, what *has* happened?’ said Lady Charlotte, drying her tears, but still questioning it rather a peevish, querulous manner. ‘You ought to have told me before. I ought to have known. I told you this afternoon that you had better tell me.’

And she gave two or three final little sobs, and then withdrew the lace handkerchief and listened.

‘Douglas has been led to believe that I am false at heart—and for Kenneth!’ said Gertrude in a low sad voice, not unmixed with scorn.

‘And how dare he believe any such thing? Now that is the man you thought so clever, Gertie; and so superior; and you *would* marry him; and I told you not to spoil him, and you did spoil him. Nothing spoils a man like making him think that he is always in the right; for then he thinks himself of course in the right when he is entirely in the wrong; and if I were you, instead of grieving—’

‘Oh, mother, have pity on me! Have patience with me. If Douglas and I are really parted, I shall die of grief. I can’t live if he thinks ill of me! I can’t live if I do not see him. Where is he gone? Did he say where?’

‘No, Gertie! He said in his wild way (just like Kenneth), that he was “gone for ever!” But he can’t go for ever; it’s all nonsense; and a man *can’t* leave home for ever, all of a sudden in that sort of way; I dare say he only wanted to frighten me. I *was* very much frightened. Now, my darling Gertie,’ she added im-

patiently, 'don't stand looking as if you were nothing but a stone image; pray don't! Shall I ask the housekeeper if *she* knows where he is gone? Only you know of course she'll guess there's a quarrel.'

'Oh! what does that signify? What does anything signify but seeing him? Let me only see him—and then—come what come may!'

So saying, Gertrude flung herself on a seat, and covered her face with her hands; while her mother rang the bell in the second drawing-room, and summoned the housekeeper to the library.

The lamps were extinguished there, and the papers and packages cleared away. Nothing was visible, when the housekeeper entered and set her solitary candle on the high black marble mantelpiece, but a little ghastly litter, like a gleaned field by moonlight.

Lady Charlotte felt exceedingly embarrassed; it was so difficult to tell the servant that her daughter did not know where her husband was. At last she framed her question; with considerable circumlocution, and not without allusion to Sir Douglas's 'hasty temper.'

The housekeeper's own temper did not seem to be in a very favourable state, for she answered rather tartly that she 'didn't know nothing,' except that Sir Douglas had told her her services were not required after her month was up, 'which was sudden enough, considering;' but as she understood the house was to be sold, there was no help for *that*. And as to where he was gone, she didn't know that, either, for *certain*, but he had been at the Horse Guards, 'uncensin,' the last two days, his man said; and she understood from the same authority, that he was 'proceedin' to the seat of war,' which Lady Charlotte knew as well as she did, was 'somewheres in the Crimea.' He was gone by express train that evening; and she hoped my lady would not be offended, but she had orders to show the house for selling or letting as soon as it could be got ready, and it must be left *empty*.

All in a very curt, abrupt, displeased manner, as became a housekeeper who comprehended that her 'services were no longer required,' because her master had quarrelled with his wife.

Lady Charlotte returned to Gertrude. She stammered out the evil news, looking fearfully in her daughter's face, as if expecting further reproaches.

But Gertrude only gave a low moan, and then, kissing her cheek, bade her go to rest.

'And you, child? and you, my Gertie?'

'I will come when I have written to Lorimer Boyd at Vienna.'

CHAPTER LV.

LORIMER BOYD.

WHEN Lorimer Boyd got that letter, he behaved exactly like Sir Patrick Spens in the old Scotch ballad, when the king sends him the commission that drowns him and his companions (ships being as ill-built apparently in those days as in our own).

‘The first line that Sir Patrick read

A loud laugh laughèd he ;

The second line that Sir Patrick read

The tear blinded his ‘ee.’

Yes, Lorimer Boyd laughed hysterically, like a foolish school-girl. Here was this woman, this angel (for, though he never breathed it to mortal man, that was Lorimer’s private estimation of Gertrude Skifton), not only not valued to the extent of her deserts, but actually thrown off, discarded, suspected, contemned, by the man who had had the supreme good fortune to win her affections and marry her. Do hearts go blind, like eyes? and can they be couched, as of a cataract,—of that hard horny veil which grows and grows between them and the clear light of Heaven, obscuring all judgment, and making them walk to the pit and the precipice as though they were following the open road of natural life?

That Douglas should behave thus! DOUGLAS!

But what was the use of pondering and pausing over that? Did not the letter tell him that it was so; and did not that letter—from her for whom Lorimer could have died—beseech his intervention, in order to communicate the real facts to him for whom Gertrude would have died; and so set all well again between that blind heart, and the heart that was beating and bleeding for grief, in that fair woman’s bosom?

In one thing more Lorimer copied the conduct of gallant Sir Patrick Spens. He instantly set about the task proposed to him, whether his own suffering might be involved in it or not.

While Gertrude was yet anxiously hoping a reply to her letter—promising that Lorimer would write those explanations to Sir Douglas which she had failed to make—Lorimer himself stood before her!

In her surprise, in her thankful gladness to see him—bitter as it was to be better believed by her old tried friend than by her

husband—she extended both hands eagerly towards him and with a little sharp cry burst into tears.

The pulse in Lorimer's brain and heart throbbed loud and hard. Her tears thrilled through him. Sudden memories of her grievous weeping by the dead father she had so loved, whom he had been so kind to, came over him. Tears shed in girlhood, when she was *free*—free to marry whom she pleased; Lorimer himself or any other man!

He stood mute, gazing at her; and then gave a hurried, hesitating greeting, a little more formal than usual. His longing was so great to take her madly in his arms, that he dared not touch her hand.

'Your letter—surprised me,' he said in a thick suffocated voice, as he sat down.

'Yes,' she said faintly, in reply.

'I am here to do your bidding. I have leave from my post, in spite of this busy, warlike, threatening time. I shall be in London quite long enough to get Douglas's reply.'

'Yes.'

'I would go to him, if you wished it.'

She shook her head.

'It would be pleasanter—less painful, I mean to *him*,—to read a letter, than to be spoken to on such a subject—even by—so good and true a friend as you have always been to both of us.'

She spoke with increasing agitation at every word; pausing; looking down.

Then suddenly those unequalled eyes looked up and met his own.

'Oh! Lorimer Boyd, I feel so ashamed! And yet, you know—you *know*, I ought not. You know how I have loved my husband from first to last. From the day when he was a mere heroic vision, whom *you* taught me to admire, to the days when I knew him—and he loved me!'

'Taught her' to love him! Alas, yes; no doubt Lorimer himself had first turned the young girl's fancy to the ideal of love and bravery he had described to her. *He* had taught her (even while listening to his faithful ungainly self) to picture the stately Highland boy, sighing in his alien home; the youth, beloved and admired, petting and caressing first his brother and then his brother's son; the soldier of after-life, treading fields of glory where battles were lost and won.

Lorimer himself had 'taught her' to love Douglas! Would he unteach her now, if that were possible? No. The double faith to

both was well kept; though neither could ever know the cost. Blind-hearted friend—sweet dream of perfect womanhood—come together again, and be happy once more, if the old true comrade through life can serve you to that end.

Every day to Lady Charlotte's little decorated drawing-room—every evening, and most mornings, came the familiar step and welcome face. He soothed and occupied those feverish hours of Gertrude's. He read to her. Ah! how his voice,—deep, sweet, and melodious,—reading passages from favourite authors,—reminded *her*, also, of the first sorrow of her life, the illness and death of her father! How thankful she had felt to him then; how thankful she felt to him now. How her heart went out to him, the day Neil went back to Eton, and she saw the tears stand in his eyes, holding the unconscious boy's hand in his own; looking at the fair open brow and candid eyes, shadowed by the dark clustering curls, so like her Douglas! Yes, Boyd was a *real* friend, and would help her if he could.

If he could.

But the day came when, from the hard camp-life of mismanaged preparations for war in far distant Crimea, a brief stern letter arrived from Sir Douglas Ross to Lorimer Boyd, returning him his own, and stating that he had perceived, on glancing at the first few lines, that his old friend and companion had touched on a topic of which no man could be the judge but himself, and which neither man nor woman should ever moot with him again. That he besought him—by all the tender regard they had had for each other from boyhood to the present hour—not to break friendship by recurring to it in any way or at any time. That occasional letters from Boyd would be the greatest comfort he could hope for on this side of the grave, but if that one forbidden subject were alluded to, Sir Douglas would not read them.

And so that other dream of hope ended! And all the comfort Lorimer could give, was that, being innocent, the day would surely come when Gertrude would be cleared. That there was nothing so suicidal as hypocrisy; or so short-lived as the bubble blown by lying lips to glitter with many-changing colours in the light of day. Lorimer built on some catastrophe to Frere and Alice more than on any effort of Gertrude's. But all trace of Frere was lost again; and what consolation could Gertrude receive from such dreams, when at any moment the precious life might be risked and lost—dearer than her own? Her Douglas dying—if he died—far away and un-

reconciled, was the haunting thought, the worm that gnawed her heart away.

Every day she pined more and more, and altered more and more in looks ; insomuch that she herself, one twilight evening, passing near her own bust executed by Macdonald of Rome, and lit at that moment by the soft misty glow which marks the impeded sunset of a London drawing-room, paused and sighed, and said to herself, ' Was I ever like that ? '

The deep-lidded, calm eyes—which no other modern sculptor has ever given with such life-like grace and truth—the gentle youthful smile of the mouth—all seemed to mock her with their beauty ; and, as the brief rose-tint vanished from the marble in the deepening grey of evening, to say to her,—' Pine and fade, pine and fade, for love and joy are gone for ever ! '

CHAPTER LVI.

A SEPARATED WIFE.

IF the thought of distant Douglas was the worm that gnawed the heart of Gertrude, the worm that gnawed Lady Charlotte's was what she termed ' her daughter's position.'

For it had flown like wild-fire round the town, first in Edinburgh, and then in London, that young Lady Ross and her elderly husband had separated. ' A most shocking story, my dear,' with many shakes of the head.

' All the accidents were against her,' her complaining parent declared.

Even an event which at first sight seemed a relief, the departure of Kenneth and Eusebia, had an evil result. For neither did that erratic couple depart together. Eusebia, after the most violent and frantic denunciations of Gertrude, whom she had accused of first seducing Kenneth from her, and then getting his uncle to forbid him the house,—declared that she neither could nor would live at Torrieburn. She would return to Spain ; she would be free.

Packing therefore into their multifarious cases all the glittering jewels (paid and unpaid) which she had accumulated since her marriage ; all the flashing fans, and fringed skirts, and black and white blonde, and Parisian patterns, which formed her study from

morning to night; she set forth, as the housekeeper expressed it, 'without saying with your leave or by your leave.'

She never even inquired what was to become of Effie, or offered to say farewell to Kenneth.

But the latter, enraged more than grieved at her conduct, and doubly enraged at finding that by a singular coincidence Monzies of Craigievar had also chosen this especial time for a foreign tour, resolved to quit a scene so bitter to him as Torricburn had become, and also to betake himself to Granada.—whether for vengeance or re-union he himself could not have told.

Pale Effie, with her large loving eyes, entreated to go with him, but in vain. He would return for her. She must be patient. She must go and stay a little while with his mother. She must be a good girl: he couldn't be troubled with her just then.

With all these arrangements or disarrangements, Gertrude had certainly nothing to do; but the world told a very different story. She was a wily profligate woman; her husband had renounced her; she had broken Eusebia's heart, and divided Kenneth and his once attached uncle for ever. Most of the ladies had 'foreseen what it must come to.' They could not think of leaving their cards at the house. They wondered Lady Charlotte should venture to force her daughter on society. They really pitied her for being Lady Ross's mother; they believed she had been a decently conducted wife herself; though an utter idiot, and of course quite an unfit guide for a person of young Lady Ross's propensities.

Some of them 'did hear' that Sir Douglas was taking proceedings for a divorce; but the difficulty was that he did not wish to ruin the young man Kenneth Ross, (who, indeed, had been 'more sinned against than sinning,') and that there was very great reluctance on the part of certain witnesses to come forward.

Sir Douglas's sister, for instance, was a very strict, pious, and modest young person, and she had openly declared she would sooner die than be questioned and cross-questioned in a court of justice.

It was a lamentable business altogether, and quite disgraceful.

Lady Charlotte, on the other hand, thought her poor Gertrude abominably ill-used in not being worshipped as a saint, and shrined as a martyr; besides being asked out every evening by the *crème de la crème* of society. She was for ever wailing and lamenting about some call not made, some card not sent in, some rudeness offered, or supposed to be offered. She thought the Queen ought personally to interfere for the protection of her daughter. She worried poor Gertrude to death by little whimperings, and petitions

to 'go this once, just to show you are asked,' when some more than usually important occasion arose. To all pleadings that it was distasteful, unnecessary, and that even were all other circumstances happy, the absence of the soldier-husband in a life of privation and danger, was surely excuse enough for not mingling with general society,—Lady Charlotte had her counter-arguments. It would not have signified 'if nothing had happened—if nothing had been said;' 'it was not for gaiety,' it was to uphold her; and she *ought* to consider that it wasn't only herself, it was Lady Charlotte,—it was the family,—that had to bear the disgrace.

When Mrs. Cregan endeavoured to console her by saying, 'I don't believe any one of these women believe a single word of the stories against Lady Ross, or think the least ill of her in their secret hearts; but I *do* believe there are plenty of them who are delighted to *pretend* that they think ill of her,'—poor Lady Charlotte confusedly declared that *that* was exactly what pained her.

'I wouldn't mind if Gertrude was *really* bad; I mean I should think it quite fair; though of course I suppose I should be vexed, being my own child. But when I *know* her to be so good, and they are all so violent and unreasonable—the Rosses of Glenrossie—I do really think the Queen ought to do something; and you see she does nothing, and there is no justice anywhere. I declare I think the people that abuse Gertrude ought to be punished. I know that tradesmen can't say things, and why should ladies? I mean that they can prosecute each other (tradesmen), because I had once a butcher who prosecuted the miller who served Mr. Skifton's father with flour: he prosecuted for being called "a false-weighted rascal;" and I should like to know if that is as bad as the things they say of Gertrude? And there is my cousin, Lady Clochnaben! but I've written to Lorimer about *that*. It is *too* bad—really too bad—and enough to break one's heart.'

Mrs. Cregan sighed compassionately. 'Well,' she said, 'I love my own girl as dearly, I think, as mother can love a child. But I declare that if I knew her to be virtuous, I should care no more for the insolence and slanders of those jealous, worldly, scandal loving women, than I should care for the hail that pattered down on the skylight of the house she was living in.'

'Ah! Mrs. Cregan, but you haven't been tried, and you don't know what it is! So proud as I was of my Gertie! But I've written to Lorimer about the Clochnabens; that's one comfort.'

It seemed a very slender comfort, for Lady Charlotte continued to apply her handkerchief to her eyes, and murmur to herself; though

she had a strong and not misplaced confidence that Lorimer would rebuke his mother for 'speaking ill of Gertrude, and refusing to call, and all that.'

'I shouldn't wonder if he *made* her call—spiteful and bitter as she is, all because dear Gertie once said to her, "This is worse than rude, it is cruel,"—when she snubbed Mrs. Ross-Heaton! I hope he'll *make* her call.'

Poor Lady Charlotte! why it should be a satisfaction to compel a visit from one 'spiteful and bitter,' and unwilling,—let the great world of mysteries declare!

But Lorimer had written, sternly and somewhat too contemptuously, on the subject to his mother.

His mother did not answer him. The answer, such as it was, came from the 'Earl,' and was worthy of the hand that penned it.

CHAPTER LVII.

SITTING IN JUDGMENT.

'MY DEAR LORIMER,—My mother put your letter into my hands. I don't often write, but as she requested me to do so on this—I must say disgraceful—business, I do so; and add my own opinion.

'You will bear in mind the *point de départ* whence she views this affair (very different from your own *manière de voir*). She considers Lady Ross an artful woman, who, after encouraging and having a *liaison* with a great blackguard (Kenneth Ross), and God knows how many more besides, inveigles you yourself into a similar situation. You were in and out of Lady Charlotte's house like a tame dog when last you were in England; and though, from the bad company Lady Ross has kept generally, both at Naples and in Scotland, a *liaison* and intimacy with *you* would rather raise her character than injure it, in the estimation of the world; and though I presume you will insist that the lady has not infringed the seventh commandment,—yet my mother feels she has a legitimate right to be astonished at your proposing a visit from *her* under the circumstances.

'She has never doubted but that your remaining unmarried is consequent on some former disappointment with regard to this woman; whose not very prudent sayings, both to and of my mother,

are probably unknown to you. My mother has nothing to go upon, to believe in the absence of her criminality; and she considers your own real happiness (which could only be consulted by marriage) marred by this entanglement. She now puts it to you: Do you, in proposing this concession of a visit to Lady Ross,—intend to marry? You cannot expect her to call while *your own* intimacy in that quarter subsists. You do not, for your own character's sake, contemplate, *if* you marry, continuing to see Lady Ross? Still less I presume of exacting from your future wife that *she* should visit her? No girl worthy your seeking would accept you on such terms. The world would not understand it. *I* would not.

'My mother's calling, of course, would be an *éclatant* testimony in Lady Ross's favour, and she has no objection to fulfil your object. But we both feel that had there been no such intimacy between you and Lady R., you never could have wished any female members of your family to continue her acquaintance. You would make no excuses for her: you would simply think what *THE WORLD* thinks; and the opinion of the world is what you have chiefly to bear in mind. Society will of course place her higher the day after *LADY CLOCHNABEN* has called, than she has stood since her separation from her husband; but my mother will be more easily placated and managed, if she thinks, for the attainment of the object you have in view, you don't go beyond what is absolutely required. None of us would approve of that. *THE WORLD* would not. If she calls *once*, she considers that will be sufficient.

'I won't give way to the apprehension that my letter can annoy you, or that there is anything in it distasteful to you to read. I hope you consider *me* a privileged person.

'Where my mother gets all the gossip from about Lady R., I can't guess. Mother H., I should think: only I doubt her being so well informed.

'Do not think me *pédant*, or dry; I enter, on the contrary, into your present feelings, but I think a year hence you will change your views as to the propriety of the step which my mother is ready to take, *on the express understanding already set forth in my letter*; and I think you have (or rather Lady Ross has) no right not to be satisfied with the conditions. You have nothing to answer for, if her character is tainted. The evil was done before *your* time.

'I once more assure you I have no intention to hurt your feelings by these observations. I speak my mind as a looker-on, and as a

man who has been, many years since, himself on the verge of making irrecoverable sacrifices, and who now only feels thankful that he was *suffered to escape*.

‘Your affectionate Brother,
‘CLOCHNABEN.’

That Lorimer read this letter through without grinding it under his heel like Kenneth, speaks much for his natural or acquired patience.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE WORLD AS IT IS.

BUT Lorimer did not answer very patiently. The grim smile of scorn faded from his lip, only to give place to a gloomy frown; and as he drew near to his writing-table, preparatory to answering that ill-judged missive, he struck his clenched hand on the unconscious paper before covering it with the rapid scrawl which disturbed Lord Clochnaben’s late breakfast a day or two afterwards.

‘MY DEAR RICHARD,—That you write, as you say, by my mother’s dictation—and report, by her desire, the comments she has thought fit to make on my attempt at arguing on the moral culpability of her conduct to her cousin, Lady Charlotte’s daughter—secures you a reply which, under other circumstances, I should probably refuse to make to such a letter as you have ventured to send me.

‘I need scarcely say, for the information either of yourself or my mother, that it is not *I* who set a value on such visits as I counselled my mother to pay,—or who considers Lady Ross’s welfare dependent on the notice of persons of her own sex, probably infinitely her inferiors in many of the qualities which should most be desired in woman.

‘When I see the sort of women who mingle freely, and receive liberal welcome, in what is called ‘the first society in the land’—when I reflect on the lives which to my knowledge some of them have led, and which would, in my opinion, render them utterly unfit to be Lady Ross’s companions, instead of its being a favour that they should visit her; when I consider the sort of hap-hazard that governs

even court invitations ; the gossip, the prejudice, the cant, the untruth, the want of all justice, the disbelief in all virtue, the disregard of all things right, and the indifference to all things wrong (so long as they are not found out) which exist in a certain set who nevertheless presume to judge and condemn their betters ; when I hear them declare that they ‘ would not for worlds ’ visit Lady So-and-So, and in the same breath entreat a friend to procure them an invitation to the house of another more lucky acquaintance, who nevertheless passes her time less with the cardinal virtues than the seven deadly sins ;—I could almost laugh at poor Lady Charlotte’s anxiety as to how her daughter is received ! As a clever old friend once said to me, ‘ It would be a farce—if it were not a tragedy ’—to see the fate of the pure and noble, swayed (as far at least as worldly circumstances go) by the impure and ignoble ; and to see even the better sort of women eagerly listening to the latter, and believing them, instead of attempting to sift truth from falsehood on their own judgment.

‘ It is true that ours is a “fast” day, and England, boastful as she always is about everything, has ceased to boast continually of her superior virtue, as she used to do (winning a little, probably, at the retort which foreign nations might make on the subject). She is content to admit that chance and certain commercial considerations run through that, as through every other channel of interest belonging to her. The ups and downs, and apparent inequalities of justice, do not trouble her, nor the agreeable certainty—

“ That the rugged path of sinners
Is greatly smoothed by giving dinners.”

‘ It is a hollow world, full of echoes ; some call, and others listen ; and then like the pigs in Scripture, they all run violently down a steep place,—and are choked with their own lies !

‘ As to you, my dear Richard, and your comments on my “tame doggishness” in Lady Charlotte’s house, I advise you to beware of again touching on that subject. If you cannot believe in virtue, at least keep your incredulity to yourself. I remember you always had a mania for parting supposed lovers ; as some old dowagers have a mania for bringing them together. I have not forgotten,—when we were both at college,—and a youth who had become entangled by a boyish passion, in a fit of mingled satiety and remorse left the companion he was with in the dead of night without farewell or warning,—to learn from the lesson which the desolation of next morning might teach, what such entanglements are worth ; the alacrity with which you undertook to reason her out of the possibility of re-union,

and the pleasure it seemed to you to cut the slender thread of her hope on that subject. Nor, in after-life, when a weak and profligate friend of maturer age had squabbled with a dancer who made a fool of him, how ingeniously you planned to crush the girl, and free him whether he wished it or no; how serenely you boasted that you would work hard to make her *seem* merely self-interested; and deliberately planned "to starve her out" by persuading the *impresario* of the theatre not to engage her, on the threat of getting her hissed.

'Do not, I pray, exert your talents in the case of Lady Ross and myself. Be satisfied that nothing can unite us, and that nothing shall part us. Endeavour to believe for once, in spite of the experience of your own and other lives, that there *may be* such a thing as a virtuous woman in the world, and a pure friendship; even if that virtuous woman's name be the theme of lying gossip in the mouths of fools.

'As to my mother, tell her *this* from me—and God forgive me if I word it too harshly:—That admitting, as of course I do admit, that she has the strictest views of female morality, and generally acts upon them, I consider it not only an error of judgment, but a *crime*, in this particular case, to aid in tormenting and insulting a defenceless and sorrowful woman, by appearing to confirm the evil judgment of strangers; when, in the depths of her own heart, she knows that she does not and *cannot* believe Lady Ross to have been an unchaste wife, but is avenging a dislike and resentment grounded on a totally different cause; and is, in fact, as Mrs. Cregan says of many of her fashionable friends, "glad to *pretend* to think ill of Gertrude"—to punish her for offence given (how involuntarily!) in more fortunate days.

'I have written to you at length on this subject, because I never intend to touch upon it again, nor to read anything you may write upon it. If my mother does not choose to humour poor Lady Charlotte's nervous fancies, by calling on Lady Ross; or chooses (as you pompously put it) to make but a single visit, in God's name let her stay away. But let her clearly understand, as regards me, that I discussed Lady Charlotte's wishes because I thought it right; and whether I marry next week, or die a bachelor, that fact has no sort of connexion with my settled and unalterable opinion of what it would be proper for her to do.

'And let her also be assured, that if I ever do marry, I should have no dearer wish at heart than that Gertrude Ross should approve my choice, and remain to her life's end my wife's intimate companion and bosom friend. Your affectionate brother, 'LOHMER.'

CHAPTER LIX.

THE WICKED LIFE THAT GERTRUDE LED, AND THE WICKED
LOVE-LETTERS THEY WROTE EACH OTHER.

THE first bitter blow, and the first pang of miserable disappointment in the apparent impossibility of present explanation with Sir Douglas, were over. He lived in the centre of those scenes of military suffering and proud English endurance, which have made the war of the Crimea the most memorable of all modern events. Lorimer Boyd returned to his post at Vienna; and Gertrude continued to reside in the decorated little home, which poor Lady Charlotte, when eulogizing it in former years, declared had belonged to 'a bachelor of the other sex.'

Placed in what might be termed affluent circumstances, both by the generous directions of Sir Douglas and her own inheritance—Gertrude employed her time and thoughts as best she might in relieving the miseries of others. True, there was little ostentation or publicity in what she did. Her name headed no list of subscribers; was conspicuous in no prospectus; made itself the chief of no 'movement' of real or imaginary reform. She did not even bind herself by a sort of nun's vow not to shop on Saturdays, and register the vow in the newspapers for fear of backsliding.

But all that others did who were much talked about, she did and was *not* talked about.

Those general plans of the gentle and charitable for emigration and education; for help to the helpless, and succour to the sick; found her ready with heart and hand, and liberal purse. Often had she preceded, with steady work and entire success, in schemes of usefulness where afterwards a procession of fair fellow-labourers followed; blowing shawms and trumpets in praise of their own goodness, and assuming to be pioneers in that path of progress where she had previously passed alone, without a record, and without a boast.

Often the meek sad mouth could scarce forbear a melancholy smile, when some one put before her the advantage of plans which she herself had sketched out and set on foot; and gave the credit of originating them to some brilliant Lady Bountiful of the hour, who was marshalling her forces under silken banners

inscribed with her own name, and sweeping with them over the traces of Gertrude's exertions, as the waves sweep over the sand.

But steadily and calmly she pursued the road that led to the only fountain of content her grieved and restless heart could know. 'When the ear heard her, it blessed her;' but she was heard and blessed, not at meetings of animated, gaily-dressed, luxurious women, leaning among cushions of embroidered silk, and setting down their porcelain teacups on inlaid tables—but in the dismal and dank dwellings of the poor; by the beds of groaning inmates of hospitals; in the dark night of the despairing and fallen; or among wailing children of evil parents; whose infancy, unaided, would be but a bitter preface to a bitterer maturity.

There was no lack of news of her husband to satisfy the only other craving her heart admitted. All that he did, and how he looked, and, how nobly he bore the miserable outward and visible suffering which so many bore likewise heroically around him, was easy to learn and to hear. Only the inner thought—the dear and blessed communion of soul to soul in letters of husband and wife—that was a dark want in her life, and kept her pinched and wan in countenance, and starved at heart.

Lorimer constantly wrote from Vienna, and his letters were her chief comfort. He did not dwell on the one topic that was for ever uppermost in her mind; he rather sought to draw her from it to general and wider interests. The world slandered her for his sake, as it had slandered her for Kenneth's sake; but she neither knew, nor would have heeded it if known. It remained for Lady Charlotte to fume and fret over these injustices. Those who are enduring a great sorrow are very insensible to mortification.

But in vain did poor Lady Charlotte,—on being told by some cruel gossip that her cousin the Dowager had said she believed 'an infamous correspondence' was still carried on between her son Lorimer and 'that bad young creature, Lady Ross,'—declare, with many tears and agitated pulls at her curl, that they were 'quite harmless letters, full of different things that didn't signify.' Her declaration went for nothing; though in truth the letters of this wicked couple were all much in the style of the samples that follow.

CHAPTER LX.

AN INFAMOUS CORRESPONDENCE.

‘ *Vienna.*

‘ MY DEAR GERTRUDE.—I waited at Dover, fearing to miss my letters. Douglas is well. The mismanagement of supplies is fearful: and the horrid red-tape-ism, that prevents the rectification even of mistakes,—in time to save valuable lives, or relieve miserable suffering,—is perfectly marvellous! He protests against this criminal folly with all the earnestness of his nature, and his energy and habit of methodical arrangement have been of use. But he writes to me, sadly:—“I wish we may not begin by a great disaster; though it is something to know that no amount of disaster will discourage English soldiers.”

‘ I passed through Paris on my way here. All as usual. No one would guess aught was going on anywhere that was tragedy instead of farce, except for the model wooden “hut for soldiers,” erected in the Tuileries garden. *That* stands like the skull-cup at Byron’s wassail festivals, a warning image in the midst of the daily route of pleasure.

‘ I employed my day at Dover in riding over to Walmer, to see the great Duke’s nest. The housekeeper told me she had lived with the Duke twenty years; but she looked like the good fairy or witch in a pantomime, always acted by a young girl. She professed unbounded admiration for her master, and said she “nearly fainted” the other day, from listening to abuse of him from some blackguard visitor at Walmer. She was “to that degree flurried, that she was obliged to go and sit on one of the cannon in the front garden, and walk on the bastion to recover herself; *besides having the gentleman turned out*” (a measure which should at once have restored her to composure).

‘ Here all is (outwardly) as careless as in Paris. Mrs. Cregan dined at Esterhazy’s the other day: Gortschakoff, Manteuffel, Alvensleben, Figuielmont, Stackelbergh, and others present. Gortschakoff affected a sort of jocund pleasantry and careless good fellowship, painful and unnatural; reminding one of the stories of Frenchmen in the Revolution, who rouged and sat down to play at cards, till the cart came to take them to be guillotined. Not that any ill fate, beyond failure, can awake the smirking Russian; but

because of the striking contrast between heavy events and light behaviour. Manteuffel was grave and grim.

'Abbas Pasha is dead. The chief delight of Abbas, when invaded, was to be drawn about in a wheeled chair by six of his prime ministers, harnessed very literally "to the car of state." Conceive our English Cabinet occupied in so practical a mode of showing their devotion to their sovereign!

'The Austrian Government have quartered the troops comfortably in the chateaux of the nobility. No one dares to complain. I saw one of the ousted aristocrats yesterday, murmuring gently, like a sea-shell put on dry sand, at having no house to go to.

'I saw also a humbler sorrow; at the door of Great Gothic St. Stephen's, a little weeping raw recruit parting with a little weeping sacristan, looking very lank and mournful in his black gown, and both their arms twined round each other's neck. As they stood there and my eye measured that small patch and blot of human sorrow against the great height of the solid church, rising up into the cold grey sky as if it never could fall into ruins, my pity departed, and I asked myself if any one's misery—mine, theirs, or any other—could possibly signify.

'You see I am getting bitter. Nothing tries the amiable spirit like isolation. It is easy to pray in the temple; but it requires a saint to pray in the wilderness.

'I ought to be quite cheerful. My last volume of poems was a great success. I am constantly solicited to send my "autograph" to persons I do not know. They send me postage stamps—according to the old nurse's saying, "a penny for your thoughts;" but why, because I can write poetry, should I be set to write copies? A beautiful young American lady (at least she tells me she is young and beautiful) has written for a lock of my hair. I answered that I hoped she would not think me selfish, but though I had read in my early lessons the urgent and hopeful line—

"Oh! give relief, and Heaven will bless your store,"

Heaven had not so blessed *my* store as to stock me with superfluous hair; in fact, that I was getting rather bald. I hope this may moderate her enthusiasm; but there is no saying.

'Write me of your health. Remember me to Lady Charlotte. In spite of the excitement here, in spite of wars and rumours of wars, I feel as if nothing on earth were of importance. The Aus-

trians hate us; the Russians hope to outwit us. All is flat, stale, and unprofitable, and I care for nothing but music and rest.

‘Ever yours,

‘LORIMER BOYD.’

Gertrude’s answer was more earnest, if not more cheerful. She wondered, in the midst of her own sorrow, at the gloom of his spirit. He seemed to her to have so much that should make life easy. The interest of a career; no actual grief; the sure prospect of title and fortune. So we judge the outside appearance of the lives even of those we love,—the painted porcelain of the cup, which holds, it may be, a most bitter draught. That for years his cup had been bitter on her account, and that now daily and hourly he felt only a different bitterness in that gnawing of the heart that comes when those who are deeply beloved suffer, and we cannot aid them, and those we have made demigods of (as he had made of his boyhood’s friend, Sir Douglas,) do something that utterly disenchants us,—all this was a sealed book to Gertrude.

‘DEAR LORIMER BOYD,’ she wrote—‘I am as well as I can expect to be under the wearing pressure of continual anxiety; and my dearest mother, I think, frets less about me than she did, and looks to some possible explanation at some time or other, which is a great relief, as her sorrow vexed me so terribly.

‘I am occupied from morning to night—I humbly hope usefully occupied—and I strive not to dream waking dreams, or let my thoughts depress my nerves as they used to do. Neil is well and happy at Eton, and looking forward to his holidays at Glenrossie with such joy, that I trust the very necessity of seeming to share it will enable me to bear the going there under such different, such painful circumstances! Let me be thankful that at least I shall be with *him*.

‘I was much interested in all you told me, but sorry to see the “gloom-days,” as we used to call them, have come back to haunt you. As to this war and its causes, and the chances of its continuance, I will not fear. When I see how completely and nearly equally men’s opinions are divided on great questions; men of the same average calibre of intellect, of the same class of interests, under the influence of the same habits and opportunities for judgment,—I feel that nothing *can* be done so rapidly either for good or evil, as would suffice to satisfy an enthusiast, or create rational terror. I believe God left that balance of opinion, lest, in our

world of restlessness and vanity of power, there should be a perpetual succession of violent changes.

‘We ebb and flow with a tide, and whether the waves come in with a roar or a *creep*, they dash to nearly the same distance. Only one thing shines clear as the light to me—that those who are born to a certain position, or who are gifted with certain talents, are bound to exert themselves for what they conceive to be the general good, according to their honest opinion, whether that be *to stay* or *to forward* the work in hand. No man has a *right*, in a position either hereditary or obtained, which places him a little above his fellows, with leisure to gaze on the perspective of their destiny, sluggishly to turn his head away from his appointed task—a task which by circumstances he is as much born to, as the labourer’s son to the plough.

‘I have heard women say that they did not comprehend the feeling of patriotism; I think I do, not so much for my country as for my *countrymen*. I believe in the full measure of good which might be done; I believe in the full value of individual exertion. It has been my dream from the first, and will be my dream to the last, to watch the lives that leave their tracks of light behind, like ships on the waters. Though the wave close over the light, the tracks once explored will be crossed again even to another hemisphere, and the influence of one man’s mind may outlive not only his existence, but the very memory of his name. Lorimer, dear friend, *you* are one of those who are called upon to *act*, and to make use of your worldly position and abilities, not only for yourself, but for the future of others; of others unknown, and without claim upon you beyond being God’s less fortunate children. Do not say you “care only for rest” in a time like the present!

‘Though you cannot aid England and the cause of justice among nations, sword in hand, like my beloved Douglas, you are bound to give your thoughts and energies to her service. Shall I hope you pretend carelessness, as you say Gortschakoff pretends cheerfulness and cordiality?

‘My heart is made very sore by the abuse of men in power here; who are, as I believe, doing their very utmost to retrieve mistakes and alleviate suffering. You will say that such mistakes ought never to have been made; but that is over. Party spirit runs high in England. At all times it is an error: at this time of trial it is a *sin*.

‘I will match your story of the obscure sorrow of St. Stephen’s church with one of obscure and tranquil heroism, more difficult than

that of the battle-field. One of the sick persons whose case lately came before me—a common labourer—was pronounced by the doctor to be merely suffering from extreme debility and want of nourishment. Then came inquiries into his work and wages, &c., and at last it came out that he owed *fifteen shillings*, and, to pay this debt, he had gone on half rations for weeks, having a large family to keep, and being apprehensive he never would be able to spare it in any other way.* Does not the patient self-denial smite one to the heart? the indulged heart that grows too often to look upon mere fancies as necessaries in our own class! And does not the strong resolution of the man show brightly in the dark story? I see him, in my mind's eye, going home at the end of his day's work hungry and tired, with his good honest purpose stronger than all the temptation of fatigue and want of refreshment, and at last falling ill. Remember, it never would have been known but for *that*. These are the obscure heroisms of life, and God's book is full of them, though they pass away from earth like the risen dew of the morning. Oh! Lorimer, do not say you care for nothing but music and rest.

'And forgive me, old teacher of my pleasant days of girlhood, when my dear father shared with me the advantage of your companionship, if I am grown bold enough to seem to whisper a lesson in my turn. I miss you daily here. The day does not pass that we do not speak of you, mamma and I.

'Yours affectionately,

'GERTRUDE.'

So wrote and thought the wife of absent Sir Douglas. But what of that? Dowager Clochnaben fiercely denounced her for her many intrigues; the ladies who were merely imitating or following her in active good works, spoke evil of her as they looked through their lists of charity subscriptions; the friends of her 'pleasant days of girlhood' either cut her, or made a favour of calling at the house 'for poor old Lady Charlotte's sake;'—and THE WORLD, whose opinion, as Richard Clochnaben justly wrote to his brother, was what we ought chiefly to bear in mind,—pronounced that she was a bad woman; that Lorimer Boyd was her new lover; and that it was a pity a man of so much ability should suffer himself to be enjoeled, and his name mixed up with that of a creature more dangerous and subtle than any Ganeer, or Anonyma, or person belonging to an inferior class; inasmuch as her education and accomplishments (of which

she was so inordinately vain) gave her a certain hold over a man accustomed to good society and fastidious as to his choice of companions.

And the more religious and church-going of her acquaintance, especially the more intimate visitors at Clochnaben Castle, and such as had approved the forbidding little Jamie Carmichael to attend school, because he had gathered blackberries on the Sabbath-day,—and those who had been most keen in admiration of Mr. James Frere's sermons; observed to each other that it was 'just a very disgrace and shame to think that such a creature should be permitted to hold her head up in any decent place of resort; and they hoped God would visit her with His righteous judgments, both in this world and the world to come.'

CHAPTER LXI.

KENNETH'S CHILD.

NEIL's holidays were come; and Neil himself, bright and beautiful, and active as a roe, was back again in the glens and hills of Glenrossie.

'It's trying to be here without papa!' he had said, the first day; and Gertrude's fortitude was not proof against the gush of sudden tears that burst from her eyes at the speech. But the boy knew nothing; only that his father was 'at the wars,' as Richard Cœur de Lion and many other great heroes had been (including Hannibal), and as his father had frequently been before. Vague, and without much personal anxiety, were Neil's thoughts; for what boy is ever depressed by thoughts of danger? Rather he pitied his mother for her apparent lowness and fear about this glorious profession of arms, and secretly wished he were old enough to be fighting by his father's side in the distant Crimea—when the fighting should begin.

But gradually some strange uneasy sensation crept into that boyish heart, and lay coiled there like a tiny snake. His mother seemed to get no letters; she was so agitated and eager one day when he himself got one from his father. She was on such odd terms with his Aunt Alice, who, though she withdrew to Clochnaben Castle during the major part of his holidays, yet chose to assert the privilege of residence for a few days at the beginning. During

those few days his mother had said she was too ill to dine downstairs. They scarcely spoke. The fiery blood of his passionate race bubbled up in the young breast. He wrote to Sir Douglas :—

‘My mother seems wretchedly ill ; she is grown very thin. I thought it was all fright about you ; but I think now something worries her. I think Aunt Alice vexes her. If I was sure, I would hate Aunt Alice with all the power of my heart ; I beg you to turn her out of the Castle. They say Christians should not hate at all, but whoever vexes my mother would be to me like a murderer I ought to kill. So you ask her, dearest and best of fathers, what is the matter, and let me know.’

Poor Sir Douglas ! How in the midst of the snow and dreary scenes of the Crimea, his brow bent and his heart beat over the school-boy letter. His Neil ! his Neil ;—to whom, ‘whoever vexed his mother would be like a murderer whom he ought to kill !’ His Neil.

And Neil, in his innocent wrath, made Aunt Alice so uncomfortable with haughty looks and stinging words, on the mere chance and supposition that she was distasteful company for his mother, that she was glad to beat a retreat.

Over the hills to Clochnaben went Alice. And before the servants who were waiting at dinner, as she helped herself to some very hard unripe nectarines grown on the stern wall of the Clochnaben garden, she said she came, ‘because it would not have been *proper* for her to remain while that unfortunate woman was permitted these interviews with her son. Of course, if there had been a *daughter*, such a difficulty could never have arisen ; she would not have been allowed to see a daughter.’

And the scanty train of servants in the service of the Dowager discussed the matter rigidly, and expressed their horror at the pollution of Glenrossie by Gertrude’s return, and the impossibility of ‘Miss Alice’ remaining in such tainted company.

Only Richard Clochnaben’s French valet smiled superior, and said such things were not much thought of in Paris, and that he wondered ‘*dans ce pays barbare !*’ that they were not more civilized.

But there was no doubt of her guilt in the minds of any of the parties so discussing in the servants’ hall ; any more than in ‘the circles of fashion.’

It was in the very midst of Neil’s vacation that an event occurred which profoundly impressed him, and caused Gertrude fresh agitation.

He was walking with his mother to the spot where he had given rendezvous to the old keeper, with whom he was to cross the hills to get a little better shooting. For Neil was getting very grand ; and

talked of good sport, and bad sport, with a beautiful toss of his beardless little chin; and the keeper was wild with admiration of 'siccan a spirity laddie' as his young master.

He was holding his mother's hand, in spite of his sport and his assumption of manliness, when suddenly they heard a little plaintive cry; and a childish and very plaintive voice said, 'Well, ye needna' beat me, I can get enough of that at home!' in a half Scotch, half foreign accent, very peculiar.

Neil leapt through the heather, and down the hollow from whence the sound proceeded, and his mother stood on the rough broken ground above, full of granite stones. A sharp cut with Alice's riding-whip descended on the shoulder of a little girl, as he advanced.

'Get back to your kennel, then,' he heard a voice say, in a tone as sharp as her whip. 'How *dare* you trespass so far on the border? Get back to the Mills!' and apparently the stroke was about to be repeated, when Neil darted forward, and taking the pony's rein close to the bit, drove it back so as to make it rear on its haunches.

'How dare *you*, Aunt Alice?' said he, breathlessly and passionately. 'How dare *you* strike any one here?'

Alice sat her pony firmly: cowardice was not among her vices.

'Oh, yes; you'd better let her come further still; you'd better have her up at Glenrossie!' she said, with a bitter sneer.

'Why not?' said the boy, as he turned to look at the little girl, who stood softly chafing with one little thin hand the place on her shoulder where she had been struck, and holding flowers close against her dress with the other.

'I wanted the white heather; I didn't know I wasn't to climb farther,' she said; and then she broke down, and throwing the white heather passionately from her, she burst into tears, and sobbed as if her heart would break; covering her little pale face with both hands.

The boy's heart beat hard; he cast a look of fury on Aunt Alice and her pony, and strode towards the pale girl.

Lady Ross also glided towards them. The child uncovered her face as Alice rode away, and looked up with wondering eyes at Gertrude.

'Oh! I know you,' she said, in a tender tone: 'I know *you*! I've been very lone since you all went. Take me away from them—Oh! take me away!' And she clutched at the folds of Gertrude's dress with the little thin white hands.

'*Effie*!' was all Lady Ross could say, and she sat down on the heather brae and wept.

'Effie!' said Neil, wonderingly; and then he smiled. Such a smile of pity, and love, and wonder, as the angels might give.

He had not at first recognised her. She had grown tall and slim, and her face was hidden by the long locks of her soft neglected hair.

'Go, dear Neil, go,' said Lady Ross. 'I will talk to her. I will see her home. You cannot stay; go with the keeper. I will tell you when I come home. Go, my darling.'

With a wistful lingering look, the boy turned to go—stood still—came back, and said hesitatingly:

'But, mother, if it is Effie, mayn't she come with us?'

'No, my boy,' answered poor Gertrude, in great agitation. 'No. Go now, and I will see you after your shooting.'

And Neil went. But before he turned again to depart, he smiled at Effie, and Effie returned it with a little trembling sort of moonlight smile of her own; her long pale chestnut hair held back a little by her taper fingers, as though to make her vision of him the clearer, and her wide, wild, plaintive eyes fixed on his face.

That look haunted Neil, boy though he was; and he had 'bad sport' that day;—if bad sport consists in missing almost every bird he aimed at.

Gertrude stood silently gazing at the little creature. Memories welled up in her heart, and her eyes filled again with tears.

This was Kenneth's poor little girl, Kenneth's only child, Effie! Poor little lone deserted Effie.

'Oh, take me home with you to Glenrossie!' repeated the pleading voice; 'they beat me so, and I'm so lone.'

'Why do they beat you, dear?'

'They beat me for everything. If I'm not quick, and if I'm tired, and if I don't find eggs, and if I'm frightened in the night.'

'What frightens you in the night, my child?' And Gertrude drew the little trembling creature to her, and sat down with her in the long heather.

The child leaned up against her bosom and clung to her.

'I don't know. I'm scared. They told me if I did anything wrong, the BLACK DOUGLAS should come in the night and take me—tall, oh, so tall! and tramping through the heather, with only bones for his feet.'

And the child shuddered, and pressed closer to Gertrude.

'Has he ever come?'

'No!' said the little girl, with a sudden look of wonder.

'No, Effie, nor ever will come: it's a story,—an ignorant, foolish

story. There is no such thing! Do you think God would let a poor little child be tormented by such a shocking thing when she did not mean to do wrong? Do you say your prayers, Effie?’

‘Oh, yes!’

‘When?’

‘In the morning I say them on my knees, and in the night I say some with my head under the bedclothes.’

‘Do you think there are two Gods, Effie? One for the day and another for the night?’

‘No; one God—one God!’ said the child, faltering.

‘Are you afraid in the day?’

‘No! Oh no!’ said the little girl with a wild smile. ‘I see the birds, and the deer, and the waking things, and the blue in the sky, and I’m not afraid at all.’

‘Then do you think the God who watches in the day forsakes the world at night, Effie? forsakes all His creatures asleep—for it is not only you, you know, Effie, who lie sleeping, but all those you have named—the poor little birds in their nests, and the shy deer among the fern, and the fish in the smooth lake: do you think as soon as DARK comes He gives them all over to be tormented and scared?’

The child was silent.

‘Effie, God is a good and merciful God, and He watches the night as He watches the day, and you are as safe in the dark under His care as in this bright, cloudless day. He is all mercy and all goodness.’

Children startle their elders sometimes by questions too profound for answer. Effie gave a deep shivering sigh, and said in a tone of grave reflection,—

‘Then why did He let me be?’

‘What do you mean, Effie?’

‘Why, if He is merciful and good, does He let me be in the world at all? Nobody cares for me, nobody wants me, and I don’t want to be here; but God puts me here. Oh! If I were but away in heaven!’ and she lifted her eyes with miserable yearning to the blue sky. ‘I’m a scrap of a creature, and it’s seldom I feel well; I’ve a pain almost always in my side, and that’s what makes me slow, and then they beat me; and there’s such strong, happy children die: a good many have died since you were here, Lady Ross, and I go and look at their graves in the burial-ground on Sundays; and that’s when I say to myself, Why should I be at all?’

‘Effie, it is God’s will that we should be—all of us; and be sure

that He has some task for us to do, or He would not put us here. But He does not torment us. Promise me if you wake in the night to think of that, and to think that we are sitting here in the sunshine, talking of His goodness.'

'I'll try; but oh! in the night I'll be scared with the thought of the Black Douglas!'

'No, my child. Think of me, not of the Black Douglas, and say this little rhyme:—

"Lord, I lay me down to sleep!
Do Thou my soul in mercy keep;
And if I die before I wake,
Do Thou my soul in mercy take."

That rhyme, Effie, was told me by a wise clever man, who always said it from the day when he was a little child, and you must always say it all your life long for love of me.'

'Oh! I *do* love you,' said the pallid creature, creeping close, as though she would creep into her very heart. 'I do love you, and please take me home with you.'

'I cannot, Effie,' said Gertrude, sadly. 'And now I must go my way, and you must go yours. Good-bye.'

'Won't you come with me never so little on the way?'

Gertrude looked down on the large pleading eyes moist with tears. She took the slight form in her arms and wept.

'Some day, little Effie, some day, perhaps, we may be all together; but not now, not now! God bless and protect you! God bless you!'

And so saying, and weeping still, Lady Ross turned to go homewards. She paused at a turn on the hills, and looked back. The little creature had sat wearily down, her hands clasped round her slim knees, looking out with her large sad eyes at the light of the declining day.

Was she again thinking, 'Why should I *be*?' Kenneth's deserted child?

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW EFFIE WAS GLADDENED.

THE mystery of Effie not being allowed to return with them troubled Neil more than all that had disturbed him before ; and his disquieted soul was none the more composed when his mother, clasping both her arms round him, and leaning her head on his breast, gave the faltering explanation, ' Your cousin Kenneth has displeased your father very much, and he would not wish Effie to be at the Castle.'

' Oh, every one says Cousin Kenneth is not a good man, and he gets drunk, and all that,' replied Neil ; ' but what has EFFIE done?'

And the boy roamed up and down, and watched for the little face, pale almost as the white heather she had come to seek ; but she had vanished away from the near landscape, and into the distance he was forbidden to follow her. And so the holidays ended.

Once only had Gertrude herself attempted further intercourse with the banished child. It was but a few days after their discourse about her terrors by night, and Gertrude's tender heart was haunted by the memory of the pleading eyes. She thought she would brave the pain for herself, and go and see Maggie, at the New Mill, as they called the place Old Sir Douglas had allotted them, and there speak to her of the fragile flower left to her rough guidance.

But Maggie's ignorant wrath was roused by the very sight of Gertrude. Fixed was her notion, that if Gertrude had wedded with her son all would have gone well. Gertrude had blighted all their lives. As to Effie, she sullenly defended her own right to manage her which way she pleased. She was ' her ain bairn, and bairns maun be trained and taught.' She'd been ' beat hersel' when she was a bairn, and was ' never a pin the waur—maybe the better.' And as the meek low voice of Gertrude pleaded on, Maggie seemed roused to positive exasperation, and burst out at last, ' Lord's sake, Lady Ross, will ye no gie ower? Ye'll just gar me beat her double, to quiet my heart. Gang back to yere ain bairn, and leave Effie to me. It's little gude ye can be till her, noo that ye've ruined her fayther, and thrawn me amaist daft, wi' yere fashious doin's. Gang awa' wi' ye! Gang awa'!'

And suiting the action to the word, Maggie waved her tempestuous white arms angrily in the air, much in the same manner as if she had desired to chase a flock of turkeys from her poultry-yard ;

and, turning with a sudden flounce into the house, and perceiving Effie leaning in the doorway, she administered a resounding slap on the delicate shoulder; for no particular reason that could be guessed, unless, according to her own phrase, it was 'to quiet her heart.'

It was some time before Gertrude saw Kenneth's child again; and even then it was but a chance interview, which gave her an opportunity of judging the effect of Maggie's education on her mind, and of the lapse of time upon her beauty.

Slimmer, taller, more graceful than ever—her large eyes seeming larger still from a sort of sick hollowness in her cheek—Effie came swiftly up to her as she stood one day gazing at the Hut, waiting for Neil, but dreaming of other times. How altered Effie seemed!

Neil, too, had altered. He was beginning to be quite a tall youth; and his bold bright brow had a look of angry sadness on it; for do what they would, his keen soul had ferreted out the existence of some painful secret; and, driven by his mother's silence to perpetual endeavours to discover for himself what had occurred in his family, he heard at last from Ailie's adder tongue the sharp sentence—'Good gracious, boy, do ye not know that your father and mother have quarrelled and parted?'

Quarrelled and parted! His idolized father; his angel mother!

Still, not taking in the full measure of misfortune, he answered fiercely, 'If they've quarrelled, Aunt Alice, it is that *you've* made mischief: I'm certain of that.'

'You'd better ask your mother whether that's it,' sneered Alice, and whisked away from him to her tower-room.

But Neil would not ask his mother. Only he kissed her with more fervent tenderness that night, and held her hand in his, and looked into her eyes, and ruminated on what should be done to any one who harmed a hair of that precious mother's lovely head; and from that hour he doubled his obedience and submission to her will, watching the very slightest of her inclinations or fancies about him, and forestalling, when he could, every wish she seemed to form.

And he prayed—that young lad—oh! how fervently he prayed, in his own room, by many a clear moonlight and murky midnight, that God would bless his mother, and that if—~~if~~ Aunt Ailie spoke the truth, God would reconcile those dear parents, and bring back joy again to their household.

But to his mother he said nothing.

And when she stood by the Hut that day thinking of him, thinking of all the past,—that darkest of shadows, the knowledge

that *he* knew there was some quarrel between his parents—had not passed over her heart.

Standing there, then, in her mood of thoughtful melancholy, her soul far away in the dismal camp by the Black Sea—in the tents of men who were friends and comrades of the husband who had renounced her—the light flitting forwards of Effie was not at first perceived.

But the young girl laid her little hand on the startled arm, and whispered breathlessly—‘Oh, forgive my coming! but such joy has happened to me; I wanted so sore to tell you! I’ve rowed across the lake in the coble alone, just to say to you the words of the song, “*He’s comin’ again.*” Papa’s coming! He’s to be back directly, and I’m to go from the New Mill to Torrieburn! Oh! I could dance for joy! I’ll not be frightened when I sleep under the same roof again with papa. It’s all joy, joy, joy, now,—for ever!’

CHAPTER LXIII.

KENNETH COMES BACK.

BUT it was not joy. Kenneth returned a drunken wreck; overwhelmed with debts he had no means of discharging; baffled and laughed at by the Spanish wife he had no means of controlling or punishing; ruined in health by systematic and habitual intemperance. He seemed, even to his anxious little daughter, a strange frightful vision of his former self. His handsome face was either flushed with the purple and unwholesome flush of extreme excess, or pallid almost to death with exhaustion. He wept for slight emotion; he raved and swore on slight provocation; he fainted and sank after slight fatigue. He was a ruined man! The first, second, and third consultation on the subject of his affairs only confirmed the lawyer’s and agent’s opinion that he must sell Torrieburn, if he desired to live on any income, or pay a single debt.

Sell Torrieburn! It was a bitter pill to swallow; but it must be taken. Torrieburn was advertised. Torrieburn was to be disposed of by ‘public roup.’

The morning of that disastrous day Kenneth was saved from much pain by being partially unconscious of the business that was transacting. He had been drinking for days, and when that day—that

fatal day—dawned, he was still sitting in his chair, never having been to bed all night, his hair tangled and matted, his eyes bloodshot, his face as pale as ashes.

With a gloomy effort at recollection, he looked round at Effie, who was crouched in a corner of the room watching him, like a young fawn among the bracken.

‘Do you remember what day it is, child?’ he said in a harsh, hoarse voice.

‘Oh, papa!’ said the little maiden, ‘do not think of sorrowful things. Come away; come out over the hills, and think no more of what is to happen here. Come away.’

To the last, in spite of all his foul offences against that generous heart, Kenneth had somehow dreamed he would be rescued at the worst by his uncle. He was not rescued. But at the eleventh hour there came an order from Sir Douglas that Torrieburn was to be bought in—bought at the extreme price that might be bid for it, and settled on Kenneth’s daughter and her heirs by entail.

‘Come away!’ said the plaintive young voice, and Kenneth left the house that had been his own and his father’s, and went out a stripped and homeless man over the hills. His head did not get better; it got worse. He swayed to and fro as he climbed the hills; he pressed onward with the gait of a staggering, drunken, delirious wretch, as he was. He looked back from the hill, at Torrieburn smiling in the late autumnal sun, and wept, as Boabdil wept when he looked back at the fair lost city of Granada!

No taunting voice upbraided his tears; no proud virago spoke, like Boabdil’s mother, of the weakness that had wrecked him, or the folly that made all irrecoverable loss, irrecoverable despair.

The gentle child of his reckless marriage followed with her light footsteps as he strode still upwards and upwards. Panting and weary, she crouched by his side when at length he flung himself, face downwards, on the earth. The slender little fingers touched his hot forehead with their pitying touch. The small cool lips pressed his burning cheek and hot eyelids with tiny kisses of consolation.

‘Oh! Papa, come home again, or come to the New Mill; to Grandmamma Maggie! You are tired; you are cold; don’t stay here on the hills; come to the New Mill; come!’

But Kenneth heeded her not. With a wild delirious laugh, he spoke and muttered to himself: sang, shouted and blasphemed; blasphemed, shouted and sang.

The little girl looked despairingly around her, as the cold mist settled on the fading mountains, clothing all in a ghostlike veil.

Come away, Papa!' was still her vain earnest cry. 'Come away, and sit by the good old fire at the New Mill. Don't stay here!'

In vain! The mist grew thicker and yet more chill; but Kenneth sat rocking himself backwards and forwards, taking from time to time long draughts from his whisky-flask, and singing defiant snatches of songs he had sung with boon-companions long ago. At length he seemed to get weary; weary, and drowsy; and Effie, fainting with fatigue, laid her poor little dishevelled head down on his breast, and sank into a comfortless slumber.

Both lay resting on a shelterless hill; that drunken wretched man, and the innocent girl-child. And the pale moon struggled through the mist, and tinged the faces of the sleepers with a yet more pallid light.

So they lay till morning; and when the morning broke, the mist was thicker yet on lake and mountain. You could not have seen through its icy veil, no, not the distance of a few inches.

Effie woke, chilled to the very marrow of her bones.

Her weak voice echoed the tones of the night before, with tearful earnestness.

'Oh, Papa, come home! or come to the good fire burning at the New Mill. Oh, Papa, come home—come home!'

As she passionately reiterated the request, she once more pressed her fervent lips to the sleeping drunkard's cheek.

What vague terror was it, that thrilled her soul at that familiar contact? What was there, in the stiff, half-opened mouth,—the eyes that saw no light,—the ear that heard no sound,—which, even to that innocent creature who had never seen death, spoke of its unknown mystery, and paralysed her soul with fear?

A wild cry—such as might be given by a wounded animal—burst from Effie's throat; and she turned to flee from the half-understood dread to seek assistance for her father,—her arms outspread before her,—plunging through the mist, down the hill they had toiled to ascend the night before. As she staggered forward through the thick cold cloud, she was conscious of the approach of something, meeting her; panting heavily, as she was herself breathing; struggling upwards, as she was struggling downwards; it might be a hind—or a wild stag—or a human being—but at all events it was LIFE, and behind was DEATH,—so Effie still plunged on!

She met the ascending form; her faint eyes saw, as in a holy vision, the earnest beautiful face of Neil, strained with wonder and excitement; and with a repetition of the wild cry she had before

given, she sank into his suddenly clasping arms in a deadly swoon of exhaustion and terror.

The keeper was with Neil. He found Kenneth where he lay; lifted the handsome head, and looked in the glazed eye.

'Gang hame, sir, and send assistance,' was all he said. 'Will I help ye to carry wee Missie?'

'No—no. No,' exclaimed Neil, as he wound his strenuous young arms round the slender fairy form of his wretched little cousin. 'Trust me, I'll get Effie safe down to Torrieburn, and I'll send men up to help Cousin Kenneth to come down too. Is he very drunk?'

'Gude save us, sir; ye'll need to send twa "stout hearts for a stour brae," for I'm thinking Mr. Kenneth's seen the last o' the hills. Ye'll just need to send men to fetch THE BODY.'

And with this dreadful sentence knelling in his ears, Neil made his way, as best he could, with lithe activity down the well-known slopes of the mountain; clasping even closer and closer to his boyish breast, the light figure with long damp dishevelled hair, of his poor little cousin Effie.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THROUGH THE MIST.

STRENUOUS and eager as Neil was, his boyish strength had its limit, and the agitation of his mind probably hastened the moment when he felt compelled to pause, and deposit his burden on the heather. Effie was no longer a dead weight. She had moved and moaned, clung for an instant, more tightly than seemed possible with such fragile arms, to her cousin, and then made a sudden struggle to be released, murmuring in a bewildered way, 'Oh, what is this? I can walk, I can walk!'

She staggered a step or two, and leaned heavily back on his protecting arm.

'Rest, dear Effie, rest,' whispered Neil, and he folded and flung his plaid down on the hill, dank with mist and the dews of morning, and softly lowered her to that resting-place. But, as consciousness returned, grief and horror woke anew in Effie's breast. Her poor little pale face grew wild and strange. She stared at Niel with eyes

that seemed to him to dilate as they gazed. Then she burst into tears ; such tears as Neil had never seen shed in his life, for he had neither known and suffered grief himself, nor witnessed it in others. The calm sadness of his mother was a familiar pain to his loving nature ; but this,—this dreadful weeping,—this young thing dissolved in showers of tears, and shaken by sobs, and wringing those slender hands, and wildly looking through the mist to the unseen sky, calling on God for help—was strange and dreadful to him. What was he to do with her ? What could he do ?

She wept, she rocked herself backward and forward, like a reed when the storm sweeps over the loch. ‘ Oh, papa ! oh, papa ! oh, my own father ! Oh, to think I shall never, never hear his voice any more ! And he said such dreadful things—things to make God so angry ! Oh, such things he said, and such dreadful songs he sang—on the hill—in the night. Oh, my poor father ! my miserable father ! oh, dreadful, dreadful things ! Oh, God forgive those songs, and all the words he said ! He was ill—he did not know. Oh, Neil, cousin Neil, do you think God will forgive ?—the terrible God ! Oh, my father ! I hear him—I hear him singing still ! But no, never again ! never again ! I shall never hear him again ! Those dreadful words are the last, the last, the last ! ’

And the weeping grew more convulsive ; and the young heart that beat in Neil’s breast seemed as if it would burst for very pity. ‘ My mother shall take you,’ he faltered out, as the only comfort he could think of. Then, as he looked despairingly round at the wild plants on the wild hill where those two young creatures sat in that chill mist of morning, he suddenly pressed her little shuddering fingers in his warm eager grasp.

‘ Effie,’ he said, ‘ oh, Effie, try and listen. I cannot tell why it should come to me now—I have not thought of it for years—the memory of a little tradition my mother told me, long, long ago, when I was a child. It was a rider, a bad wild man, a robber, I think, who was carcering over ground like this, rough, full of granite stones and slippery places, and his horse threw him ; pitched him right overhead ; and all that those who ran to help him heard, was a frantic curse and a groan ; and then silence, for he was dead. But when they came near the place, there was a strange plant grown there, a tall thistle with variegated leaves streaked with white, and upon the leaf, in irregular characters, these lines were traced :—

“ Betwixt the stirrup and the ground
Mercy was sought—and mercy found ! ”

My dear Effie, the story is a wild fable, but God's endless mercy is no fable. Moments to Him may be years of ours, as years of ours are but seconds to Him. He knows the thoughts that would have changed all the heart. He knows if the dying would have lived a better life, and lived to serve Him. He knows,—oh, Effie, are you weeping still so bitterly; will nothing comfort you?

'Oh, my father, my father! The dreadful, dreadful words!' sobbed Effie. 'The dreadful, dreadful night! Oh, my heart is broken; my heart is all dark,—for ever and ever and ever!'

As she spoke, as she sobbed, as she rocked to and fro, suddenly the mist lifted; the unequalled loveliness of that sight, only visible in the Highlands and among similar mountain scenery, burst on the gaze of the anxious lad, and the desolate girl by his side. The golden glory of sunrise broke over and under the floating clouds; the leaden lake turned blue, and rippled with silver lines; the far-off falls of Torrieburn, the white speck of its dwelling-house, the lovely towers of Glenrossie, and even the grim grey visionary rocks of Clochnaben, all caught a share of the tinging rays; and Neil's beautiful face—as he turned in wonder and admiration to this opening of the golden gates of morning—brightened with a rosy flush, half of emotion and half of the reflected light, and never looked more beautiful. Even Effie ceased to weep. A strange awe conquered sorrow for the moment. The large wild eyes, with their arrested tears sparkling on her pallid cheek, looked also at that wondrous glory of Nature,—at the rolling veil of mist and the breaks of light under,—at the warmth and life that were stealing into the cold night-saddened scenery, and changing all as in a vision.

'Oh!' she said, 'it is as if we saw it all from another world! Light has come.'

'Yes, Effie,' said her cousin, as he slowly turned from the radiance and fixed his earnest gaze on her face, 'light *has* come; and so also mercy will come. "*Post tenebras, lux*";"—after the darkness, light! Doubt all the worth and goodness of man: doubt all things on earth; but never doubt the mercy of God in heaven, for that is *SURE*.'

And as he spoke, they both rose, and struggled down the precipitous sides of the hill land in hand, or Effie's steps supported in difficult places by Neil's arm; till, weary, bewildered, exhausted, but with a sense of protection and consolation hovering round her, she reached at length the house of Torrieburn.

The two cousins waited there together—oh, awful waiting! for the return of that senseless weight which had gone forth a living

man—for the return of those sent to seek the poor sinner who had passed away in the blank night singing blasphemous drunken songs on the hill-side—for Kenneth ; no longer master of Torrieburn ; no longer grieved, or glad, or offending, or suffering, or existent among men—for the solemn coming of the strong-limbed Highlanders, who had gone to aid the keeper in the carrying home of ‘*THE BODY.*’

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BOUNDLESS MERCY OF GOD.

BUT when those strong men came,—with heavy, even, dreadful tread,—the burden that they bore was not a corpse ! The doctor met them on the threshold, and Neil met them there ; while Effie sat cowering in an inner chamber, feeling as if she had but one sense left—the sense of hearing, and that the beating in her ears disturbed even that.

The doctor met those men, and helped to lay their burden on a bed ; and watched, and studied, and examined, and spoke in an under-voice to the old keeper and kept silence for a little while, and watched again with downcast eyes ; and held Kenneth’s clay-cold hand, and laid his own on Kenneth’s heart. And then he spoke to Neil.

Neil heard, and gave a short wild cry, in his excitement, in his gladness, and rushed to that miserable room where slender Effie sat despairing and listening.

And innocently, in his boyish exultation of better news, he took that little dishevelled head and drew it to his bosom, and kissed it as he pressed her fondly to his breast—kissed it on the shining hair, and on the white smoothed forehead, buried as the pale face was on his beating heart.

For Kenneth was not dead ! He might live, or he might die ; there was congestion of the brain, and danger, and horror, and all evil chances possible. But he was not dead !

‘Effie, your father is not dead !’ So spoke young Neil ; and Effie, after the first throb of bewildered surprise, heard him and blessed him, and flew to that father’s side whom she had so dreaded to see again ; and smiled wild smiles at those Highland bearers ; and flung herself into the old keeper’s arms, and kissed his face and

horny hairy hands, and called down God's blessing 'on him and his;' and wept and smiled again, and kissed him again, till the old keeper wept too, and called her a 'daft lassie,' and lifted his bonnet from his honest pious brow, thanking Almighty God for His 'special mercy that day.'

That day; ay, and that night.

For in the dead of night—the third night—Kenneth awoke; awoke from senseless slumber, and his heavy half life. He looked around him at visible objects: a dim light lit the room.

The hired village nurse who was there to wait upon him, had sunk into a midnight sleep. Her wrinkled face—seamed with lines of care from obscure sorrows unknown to those who employed her—was sealed in that deep fatigued slumber which nothing short of the cry of 'Fire!' or some equivalent event, could be expected to disturb. She was not watching: she was dreaming of watches more dear, more intimate, more sorrowful. She was dreaming of her own dear ones, her own lost ones, before she came to watch strangers for hire; withered and weary, and buried in sleep.

And another sleeper was there—Maggie! Maggie, who had been sent to in all haste, and had returned in wild hurry with the messenger. For she had kept her word well had Maggie. Kenneth, imperious, insolent, oppressive to her old father, had been an exile from her heart. She had not seen his once-loved face for many a day; she had stayed, as she said she would stay, with her parents.

But Kenneth ill and dying in the cold mist on the hill-side, Kenneth suffering and ruined and alone, was once more suddenly her idol and treasure, 'her ain bairn and bonny king o' men.' She was ignorant, erring, homely; but love is grand, and holy, and divine; and mother's love, as it is the first, so also in its intensity is it the strongest upon earth. Lovely as is the scriptural promise of complete union between truly-knitted husband and wife—'they twain shall be one flesh'—a higher comparison yet waits on mother's love. No fleshly union is spoken of there, but it is made akin to, and one with, the eternal Spirit of God: 'As a mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' Inspiration itself could give no more perfect image of love divine.

Maggie, then, was there to nurse and comfort Kenneth; cradle-love was with the man forsaken by his untrue Spanish wife, and by the careless friends of dissolute hours; cradle-kisses were once more showered on his brow, and cheek, and pale swollen lips. And even now, though animal nature preponderated in poor Maggie, and

the anxiety of her soul failed to keep her body waking, there was something intensely fond and maternal in the attitude of her leaning head with its rich masses of golden hair, (scarcely yet dimmed with streaks of grey,) and the large white arms and clasping hands stretched, even in slumber, across the pillows that supported the unconscious form of her Absalom.

She slept, and the nurse slept—heavily, profoundly.

But there was one sleepless watcher in that room. Effie had been put to bed; Maggie herself had assisted in that ceremony; had first boxed her weary ears for weeping and wishing to stay up, and had then sat down on the narrow bed and wept with her, loudly and grievously: till Effie had almost felt the new mystery of jealousy creep into her soul, as she had felt the new mystery of Death,—at the evidence of a love for her father whose passion was so like her own.

.And in the silent watches of the night, when the dim light was burning and gleaming down on those other sleepers, and no sound but their heavy breathing made life in the room, Effie glided from her inner chamber, and stood pale and sad and slender in her white night-dress, by Kenneth's bedside.

Then it was that, as he opened his eyes conscious of outward sight and sounds, he saw her, like a white angel, ascend and lightly kneel upon his bed; facing him, but with eyes upturned to Heaven, while the fervent sorrowful tender voice sounded in his ears, speaking brief sentences broken by repressed sobs. 'Oh God! dear God! let me be lonesome always,—or let me die in pain, great wretched pain,—but let papa live, and be a good man,—let papa live, and let me die instead. Amen.'

Such were the words that greeted Kenneth, or seemed to greet him, in the dreamy night. Sweet mournful voice—sweet little mournful face! Is it a vision or reality that haunts him now?

It is reality, Kenneth—it is your own poor child—your young helpless daughter, praying thus to the God of judgment, the God of mercy.

All of a sudden, as comes a flash of irradiating light, there came to Kenneth's soul a consciousness unknown before. This was, indeed, his child—his own flesh and blood and spirit; part of himself; the better, the more innocent, part of himself. And she was praying; praying—not for herself, not for blessings to her own life, but for HIM. Willing to die, to suffer, to be in 'wretched pain,' for *his* sake; to save *him*; to rescue *him* from some unknown evil, from the wrath of a terrible God!

With a feeble hollow voice, in the depth and darkness of

night, Kenneth called to his child: 'Effie, my little Effie, is it you?'

'Oh, papa, oh, my blessed and beloved papa, yes! Oh, father, yes, it is I! I am here.'

Then Kenneth said, with a groan, 'Pray for me, Effie—I dare not pray for myself.'

'Pray for me.' Who shall doubt that God permits children to be our angels on earth? 'I say to you, that *their* angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.' ALWAYS. Not in vague glimpses, as to our baser and clay-loaded natures, but always. Oh, blessed privilege, of dwelling in the light that never is withdrawn!

So in the murky night, while the nurse and poor Maggie slept, God's angels woke; and the slender child, dawning towards womanhood, woke also, and prayed for her wretched father.

And it seemed to Kenneth as if scales fell from his eyes while she prayed. His selfishness; his insolent insubordination; his sinful passion for Gertrude; his want of tenderness and pity to his poor mother, the ignorant loving Maggie, with all her faults and all her virtues; his ceaseless ingratitude to his uncle; the awful memory of that dim drunken morning when his parricidal hand might have committed murder; all smote and stabbed him to the heart sharply as a two-edged sword! God's mercy was dealing with him; God visited him, and spoke to him with that mysterious voice, heard by the first sinners in Paradise 'walking in the garden in the cool of day.'

And in that midnight hour, on the wings of that child's prayer, the repentance of Kenneth went up to Heaven!

'Have mercy, Lord, and create a new spirit within me,' was all poor Kenneth said, for he was unused to pray. But God asks not for human eloquence. The publican who smote on his breast with the brief petition, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' went down to his house justified rather than the other. 'God forgive me,' was *this* sinner's murmured supplication. 'God have pity on my dear, dear father,' was Effie's simple reiteration of yearning petition.

Did the angels hear and bear it to the foot of the Almighty throne?—Assuredly they did. And in the morning Kenneth lay sad, and weak, but sensible, with his little Effie by him; and he scrupled not to own to that devoted child that he felt as if he had been blind all his life; and that suddenly God had healed him, and caused him to see, the selfish, sinful, strangely rebellious course which he had taken continually in the bygone years.

So Kenneth repented ! In feebleness, bitterness, sickness, and humility, never to be the same man again ; but with a deep and true repentance, abjectly sincere. There are resurrections on earth, other than the one which leads from death to immortality. There are illustrations of God's beautiful emblem of divine change in the bursting of the dull chrysalid case to let the winged Psyche forth, other than the one illustration of coffined clay, from which the imprisoned soul escapes and ascends to glory.

The *lesser* resurrections, of our world, are daily round us. Memories of good ; and words of forgotten prayers ; and voices of friends neglected ; and lessons of life from which we turned impatiently, as children from dry tasks—these all may rise again : in no spectral light, but clad with a saintly halo ! Rise—like the fountain in the desert that quenched the thirst of perishing Ishmael when all around seemed but barren sand ; rise,—as the good thought rose in the dissolute prodigal's heart while he fed the foul swine despairing ; turning our steps back, like his, into that long-forsaken track of peace, which shall lead at last to our Father's mercy and the eternal pardon.

'God has given me the treasure I least deserved,' Kenneth said, as he lay with one weak hand locked in his mother's, and the other caressingly folding his daughter's head to his cheek ; 'I have this good dear child ; and I was such a bad son to you, mother !'

And poor Maggie's wide blue eyes opening in mingled amazement, pity, and passionate affection, she answered in a sort of confused rapture, 'Oo ! Kenneth, my lad, I loo ye mair than it ye'd been the best son to me that iver lived ; but I'll loo ye mair and mair, noo that ye're sae sick and sorry.'

And sick and sorry Kenneth continued for a long time. It was not to be expected that such a shock, to an already broken constitution, should pass and leave no traces. He spoke with difficulty ; walked with difficulty ; a general and unnatural feebleness such as is often the forerunner of paralysis, deadened his faculties. He leaned heavily on Effie (who loved to be so leaned upon), and told her, with a smile, she was his 'live walking-stick.' He sat mute and unoccupied ; looking out into space, into vacancy ; he was no longer the Kenneth they had known, but another Kenneth altogether.

Dear, inexpressibly dear to them ! They judged him not ; they blamed him not ; they desired only to serve and tend him. Effie's wistful eyes followed and rested on him as a dog watches for his master ; and in all the little household cares and medical

appliances that fell to her lot to perform, she 'did her spiriting gently' as Ariel in the island of storms before the wand of Prospero was broken.

CHAPTER LXVI.

GERTRUDE HAS A NEW TROUBLE.

WHEN Neil narrated to his mother the events of that agitated morning, he was amazed that she did not express her intention of instantly going to Torrieburn to tend and comfort Effie: amazed and disappointed.

'Whatever Kenneth may have done to anger my father, poor dear Effie cannot have offended him! Indeed, the Torrieburn agent told me of his generous intentions, that in buying Torrieburn it should be settled on Effie: why then can you not go to her? Oh, mother, she is so forlorn and miserable!'

Gertrude wept.

'My boy,' she said, 'you cannot think I do not pity Effie. You shall write to your father what has happened. When he knows—when he hears——'

She paused, choked with painful emotion.

'When he knows and hears, mother,' said Neil, hotly, 'he will wonder that all from this house have not gone to Effie in her distress.

'Forgive me, forgive me, my own dearest mother!' he suddenly added, as his mother leaned back with closed eyes, through the lids of which the tears she tried to check were stealing.

But he was restless and unsatisfied. He withdrew to a distant window, in the sunny morning-room, and took up a book and tried to read. Then suddenly he tossed the book from him, and looked wistfully from the window in the direction of Torrieburn.

'When I am a man,' he said—in a proud, resolved tone, so like the voice of Old Sir Douglas that it thrilled through his mother's brain,—'when I am a man, I will *marry* my Cousin Effie, and take her away from all this misery; I have determined on that.'

'God forbid!' exclaimed Gertrude; and her startled gaze was fixed on her son, as if measuring the interval between herself and that new trial.

'When I am a man.' The tall, lithe, handsome lad who had

carried his cousin across the moors, and now stood in such an attitude of proud independence, stating his premature determination as to the most serious matter that can affect human existence! The onward years, how near they seemed while she gazed on him.

‘When I am a man!’ The waters of Marah flowed over the soul of his mother. A new strange visionary perception seemed given to her,—of a future in which some other love should be beyond and above *her* love in her son’s heart, and be thwarted on her account, for some fault which she was supposed to have committed. Her Neil’s heart perhaps following his strong boyish fancy and breaking with grief: for how could Sir Douglas ever agree to a marriage between his son and Kenneth’s daughter? And therefore Gertrude exclaimed, ‘God forbid!’ with more passion than she generally spoke.

And it really seemed as if the new misery was dawning from that moment; for Neil’s lovely indignant eyes flashed through something very like tears, and his lips trembled as he hastily answered. ‘Mother, I did not think you could be so cruel! Whatever Uncle Kenneth has done (and of course I see that you also have quarrelled with him, as well as my father), that dear girl can have sinned against no one. She has no mother to comfort her; no lady friend: nothing but Mrs. Ross-Heaton. Oh! poor Effie,—poor cousin; if you could have seen her coming down the hill—if you could have seen her pale, pale face and ruffled damp hair, and damp clothes, in which she had lain on the hill all night! Oh! I must go and see how she is this evening,’ continued he, excitedly; ‘I must go. I did so hope you would have come. I thought we should have gone together. I *must* see Effie! I must! I will not be longer away than I can help.’

And the passionate scion of a passionate race opened the door of the morning-room hurriedly as he spoke; held the lock in his hand a moment, looking wistfully back, as though he half expected his mother to change her mind; and then, closing it hastily, ran downstairs, and out over the hill. Over the boundary-line of Glenrossie, where the white heather grew which Effie had sought, the day his detested Aunt Ailie had struck at her with the little sharp riding-whip: (he saw it now, sickening a moment in the air, like a snake’s tongue, and then coming down so viciously on the thin white shoulder and slender arm!) Over that boundary, into the lands of Torrieburn, and on to the Falls, and past the Falls, to the house; and into the sick chamber where Effie watched. Pale weary Cousin

Effie; with her small white hands tightly clasped together in her lap, in a sort of agony of uncertainty and anxiety.

He looked at Kenneth and sat down by her—by the bedside. She answered in the lowest whisper his whispered greeting, and then those two sat silent, hand-in-hand, for a while, both looking only at the face of the sick man.

Then, when the time for parting came, Neil motioned her to follow him to the outer door, and spoke in his own earnest voice, unrestrained by the necessary quiet of that painful sick-room.

‘Effie, dear, you look paler than ever: take care of yourself; eat and drink, and strive to be strong. You know you cannot nurse your father, or help in any way, if you fall ill yourself. And you will be ill—I am sure you will—if you don’t take care.’

And the young radiant eyes anxiously perused the face of the tender girl, and the young heart sighed: still thinking his mother should be there.

‘I will come every day, Effie,’ he resumed; ‘every morning and every evening. Expect me: I will never fail. I shall have no thought but you, till I see you better.’

‘Oh! do come,’ said the young girl, faintly. ‘It helps me so. The morning I do well enough, but the evenings will be so eerie; and I dare not make it light enough to read, for the doctor says all should be so dark and still.’

‘I’ll come, Effie.’

And with the firm quick words, he stepped lightly from the threshold, and trod with a firm quick step the distance that lay between her home and his! *Her* home for ever! He was glad of that. He loved his father for having thought of that. It was noble, generous, like his father. He comprehended, he knew, how hopeless the helping of Kenneth had been; it was the common gossip of the old keeper and others in the place. Neil could not choose but know it: and bad Kenneth had justly forfeited all right to his estate. But it was a beautiful thought of his father, to forego the possession of Torrieburn, to buy it, and settle it on the ruined man’s only child. Ah, what could be the quarrel between Glenrossie and Torrieburn, bitter enough to divide them so? What could make his mother keep aloof from innocent Effie? What?

That mother sat buried in mournful thought, till his return. The evening meal passed away untasted: the book which had been occupying her was unread: and, when Neil’s fond good-night kiss was accompanied by a murmured prayer for pardon ‘if he had spoken hastily before he went out,’ she shook her head, and re-

turned the kiss with passionate tenderness; but there was no explanation between them.

And, as every morning Neil went out with more restless impatience, a little earlier than the day before to Torrieburn, and every evening returned a little later, feeding his lingering eyes on Edie's farewell smile, as she stood like a small white statue under the dark fir-trees—Gertrude's sadness deepened more and more; and she wrote a cheerless, anxious letter to Lorimer Boyd, telling him how it was with them all, and her grievous perplexity of heart.

CHAPTER LXVII.

LORIMER WRITES ABOUT KENNETH.

LORIMER BOYD's answer—to adopt the foreign phraseology of the Earl his brother—'ne se fit pas attendre.' He wrote by return of post. 'Take the boy instantly away from Scotland,' he said. 'Even if it was understood between you and Douglas (which I cannot see) that he was always to spend his holidays at Glenrossie, and that your enjoyment of his society was limited to meeting him there, the peculiar circumstances would justify you in making some different arrangement. Take him away instantly. He is not so young but this fancy may give you more trouble than you can foresee. Part him and that poor child, in mercy to both; and in pity to yourself. I can see that you are ill, in every line of your letter. Leave Scotland; go somewhere to the sea-side, and let dear Neil sail and boat about, during the remainder of his holidays. I have written to Lady Charlotte. I hope she will forgive my frightening her a little about you.

'Neil's account of Kenneth may be quite correct, but I very much mistrust it. I don't wish to speak ill of my countrymen, but I never yet saw a remorseful Scotchman, or a penitent Scotchwoman. The Caledonian mind takes quite a different view of the condition of souls (or at least of their own souls) from that generally taken by Christian folk. Something of the energetic obstinacy with which they pursue worthy and estimable aims overflows and tinges their notions of conduct less praiseworthy. We are told that we should be prepared to give a reason for the faith that is in us. A Scotchman or Scotchwoman is always prepared to give a

reason for the *sin* that is in him or her. Justification by faith with them means faith in their own justification. And this not only individually, but for all of their own kith and kin. It is quite astonishing to see a whole family of the severest prudes placidly contented with their family sinner, and convinced that her sin was, and is, most rationally excusable, even while hunting full cry after some alien outsider who does not belong to them. I am sure, if *we* had such a thing as a family sinner amongst us, at least of the female sex—I am myself the nearest example of it, I suppose among the males—that even my mother whose severity is known to you, would hold all her “dictums” in suspense for the occasion. There is an anti-Magdalenism in the Northern constitution. No Scottish Mary staunches her tears with her hair; though those lovely penitents are generally painted with golden locks, possibly to enhance and show the difficulty and value of their repentance: nor does the Scottish Peter go out and ‘weep bitterly’ under a conviction of his own irresolution in the path of virtue. It is weakness to lose your self-esteem, and weakness is a thing the Scotch mind abhors. We struggle for that self-esteem under the most untoward circumstances; as a man shipwrecked, and losing a hundred times its value, dives down into the cabin for his watch.

‘When Kenneth Ross gets better, we may probably see in him a fair illustration of the impressive and agreeable distich—

“When the Devil was sick, the Devil a saint would be;
But when the Devil got well, the devil a saint was he!”

‘I know this letter will make you angry. I am glad of it. It will rouse you, and do you good. Write and scold me.

‘And yet—forgive my bitterness. How can I be otherwise than bitter against one who has caused you so much—such unmerited sorrow? This man may be a true penitent. There may be more joy over him than ever there will be over me, however great may be my needs in that way; but till we see how the fag-end of this misspent life turns out, and how far

“Vows made in pain, as violent as void,”

are held to when pain is over, let us not trust too implicitly to the existence of that angelic chorus which we cannot hear.

‘I shall be anxious to know what Douglas writes in answer to Neil’s communication.

‘Yours ever,

‘LORIMER BOYD.’

A tender frightened letter from Lady Charlotte followed, speaking of Scotland as if it had suddenly become Nova Zembla, and adjuring Gertrude to remember that her father had died of consumption, 'though he was taken everywhere, dear, to be cured and saved,' and with some 'inconsequence' following up this dreary admission with the sentence—

'Therefore come at once (or as soon as you can) to the Isle of Wight, where I have already written to take a pastoral cottage' (what Lady Charlotte meant by 'pastoral' must remain a matter of conjecture) 'very near the sea, and away from people—though I must say I do *that* to please *you*, dearest Gertie, for I do not like living only with shrimps—I mean not seeing one's neighbours; not that one's neighbours are always neighbourly, and I'm sure you have reason to think so; though the ones far off are not a bit better than the neighbouring neighbours; witness my cousin Clochnaben, who has written most spiteful and cruel things even now. And she says Kenneth Ross is *shamming*, in order to get you back again, but you are afraid to go to him now, and all sorts of things of that sort. I'm sure I hope people won't think I took the pastoral cottage because we were afraid or ashamed either; but I thought *you* would like it best, and that was my reason, and the first week begins next Thursday; so I do hope you and Neil will set out; and tell him there are two boatmen, and thousands of eggs that he can have. I mean the boatmen, and they will amuse him. The birds sit screaming on the rocks, and I wish they would not, for it has such a melancholy sound; but you like those sort of things.' And so God bless you, my own dear Gertie, and bring you safe to

'Your affectionate Mum,

'C. S.

'P.S.—I have got such a pretty seaside dress, dark, dark blue, with a quantity of white embroidery—much prettier than black; and I am pleased with it, though my cousin Clochnaben said she hated that sort of dress, and that it made women look as if they were *tattooed* like savages. Very rude, wasn't it? 'C. S.

'P.S. No. 2.—Get yourself a dark-blue linsey-wolsey, my dear Gertie, and don't cough.'

And Gertie read—and sighed—and pondered—and told Neil that she did not feel well, that her mother had taken a cottage in the Isle of Wight for them, and that the rest of his holidays would be

spent there. A sentence she pronounced very hurriedly and timidly, possessed as she was by a vague painful expectation of Neil 'flying out,' and refusing to leave the hills that enshrined his cousin Effie.

She mistook—as we do continually mistake even those we love best. Neil no sooner took in the fact that she had been suffering uncomplainingly, and required this change, than he passionately embraced her, expressing himself in broken sentences of self-blame for 'being such a brute' as not to see that she was ill—'so selfish' to require to have it explained to him—so 'inexcusable,' not guessing that it would be better for her to get out of the cold mists of the hills to a better climate.

And with the last sentence the colour suddenly flushed his cheek, for he thought of Effie; and he looked eagerly in his mother's face, dreaming, 'If we could but take my cousin with us!'

But he saw nothing in that sweet face but a look of pain and faintness, now becoming habitual.

His farewell to Effie was sad and fervent. She was to write every day, or rather every evening, at the hour that would be so blank and dismal when he should have departed; when his active bounding step should no longer cross the moor, nor his strenuous young arm shorten time by rowing the coble across the lake—when the morning light must come, whether in mist or sunshine, without his radiant eyes; and the evening close in without his comforting voice to cheer her.

Effie wept bitterly. The last he saw of her she was weeping, and turning from his lingering farewell gaze to weep anew within the house.

He thought of those tears all the long day in the railway carriage, starting next morning for England; watching the pale meek countenance of his mother seated opposite to him, and wondering still what the bitter, bitter quarrel could have been, that made Kenneth an alien, and his poor little daughter a banished creature from Glen-rossie and the love of its inhabitants.

And his mother, as she stole furtive glances at his restless passionate, handsome face, felt the cold poison of doubt creep through her heart as the thought,

'Oh! will the day ever come when even my boy Neil shall love me less?'

And she thought, *if* that day ever came, death would be so welcome.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

TRACES OF JAMES FRERE.

LADY CHARLOTTE felt rather ill-used by the increasing ill-health and depression of spirits of her daughter. She wrote a somewhat peevish and deprecatory letter to Lorimer Boyd:—

‘I took a pretty pastoral cottage here, as you advised; and indeed only because you advised it, for I don’t much fancy pastoral things myself; only, Gertie having such reliance on your judgment and your kindness, I thought it for the best to do as you said. But you are quite mistaken in saying she would be the better for it: she is not the least better, rather worse: and she has a cough that keeps me always remembering her poor father; which is very distressing. I wish you could come from Vienna, for she is certainly better when you are in the way to talk and read to her. I am sure I would read to her with pleasure, but I don’t understand or relish the sort of books, and it is not the same thing; and she doesn’t care for news, and I don’t know what to do with her. She has left off walking, and lies on the sofa looking at the sea; and all I can get from her is, “I don’t feel very strong to-day, little mother.”

‘Now, of course, when you told me I should do her good by coming here, all this is very disappointing; and I hope you will write to her and advise her not to fret; for I know she is fretting; and the hard thing upon me is, that she frets more now than she did, though nothing new has happened; and though she used to be so fond of pastoral places, and I have got a cottage at Bonchurch just like the one in Moore’s Melodies,—about Love and Hope, you know—where “he opened the window and flew away.” The roses climb right over the roof, and so does the clematis, and, except that there are gnats at night (in spite of a little beginning of frost), she might be so very comfortable! I wish we had never come across these Rosses of Glenrossie, for what with their tempers, and the things that are said, and Gertrude taking a turn so unexpected, I am quite sick with vexation. I wish she had married any quiet man,—yourself even,—rather than that things should be as they are. Neil is well; and I go out sometimes to see that he don’t drown himself. I mean, to see that he has the right boatmen with him; for he is venturesome and reckless to a degree; a Ross all over, and as passionate as any of them; but a dear boy too. And even he can’t get

Gertrude's spirits up; for she says, "Oh my Neil!" "Oh my Neil!" in such a begging voice, it quite makes one's heart ache; and, when he tries to guess what she would have,—and says if it frightens her, this boating, he'll give it up—she shakes her head and says, "No, dearest, it is not that!" But she never says what it is; and it is so unlike my Gertie to be so unreasonable.'

And Lorimer, pondering much over this somewhat *décousue* account of matters, wrote as Lady Charlotte desired, advising Gertrude, 'not to fret' and showing her why she ought not to fret. And he wrote also to Neil,—a long letter, taking the most vehement interest in the boats and boats, their sailing qualities and tonnage; and narrating adventures of his own in boyish days, and curious anecdotes of various kinds, all more or less connected with this new pursuit. For he thought the eager mind and body of the lad would be all the better for an absorbing occupation of that kind.

He was right.

Cousin Effie's letters came, and were most welcome, and fondly answered. But, after a post or two, they were often pocketed to read 'as soon as he should be afloat in the *Sea Gull*;' and the shifting of a sail or handling of a rope would cause him to look up, and break the thread of Effie's simple and tender sentences; once, indeed, entirely lost to him; for a stiff breeze in rounding a rock, and a sudden rainbow, so engaged Neil's attention, that he suffered the open letter to escape from his hand, and only became aware of the fact, by seeing it flutter and rest like a little white bird on a distant wave, sweep over the next, and then disappear for good.

Even then, Neil bore the deprivation with very cheerful philosophy; sensibly reflecting that he had seen the first line or two, beginning, 'Papa is better, and things get more and more comfortable;' and taking for granted that 'all the rest of it' was in the same satisfactory strain.

It was on one of the occasions when Lady Charlotte went down to the beach with him, 'to see that he did not drown himself,' that an event occurred which thrilled her timid soul with extreme terror.

She was walking along a lonely bit of shore by Black Gang Chine, when a man, who was sauntering in the same direction, came near and joined her, as it seemed, in her walk. He was not a gentleman, nor a common sailor; Lady Charlotte could not make out what he was. She felt a mixture of anger and fear at his self-imposed companionship; and looked anxiously about for Neil; but Neil was nowhere to be seen.

At last she summoned courage, and asked the man which way he

was going, whether he 'wanted anything;' 'money or anything?' The man laughed, and said he would be very glad of anything the lady pleased to bestow. But, even after pocketing the half-crown which followed his reply, he continued to walk by her side. 'I do mostly walk this way,' he said. 'I've had a hard tussle with a mate of mine, and I'm on the look-out to see him again. You see, ma'am, I'm a smuggler; or rather I *was* a smuggler; but, getting acquainted with a farmer's daughter here, she over-persuades me, like, to give up them sort of ways; and her father, he made a point of it, saying no man should have his daughter that did not get his livin' in a honest way; and there was plenty of honest ways without smuggling. Well, I resolves to cut the concern, and I goes to my mate (there was two of us) and says, "Give me my half-share of the value of the boat, for I'm going to leave her!" It didn't please him; and we had a wrangle; and he says, "Leave, you may; but the value of the boat you don't get." I said I would; he said I shouldn't; and, when high words had passed, he clinched them with these words—"She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to take the law of me to get her value; so be off, like a sneaking fellow as you are." Well, I'd depended on the money for getting things for my Mary, and I thought, and thought, and thought, how to be revenged on him; and sure enough in the night I went where the boat lay in the cove ready for her next run, and I sawed, and cut, and worked with a will, I can tell you, till half the boat was no more use than splinters, and then I stuck up a board with a paper on it with his own words written, against he should come: "She's a smuggling craft, and you'll hardly be able to *take the law of me*."

'Oh gracious! how could you?' exclaimed Lady Charlotte, looking fearfully at the stern profile of her unwelcome companion as he walked by her side.

'Well, you see, he was hindering me of my Mary. And he was all rags when he come here, when first I put him in the way of earning, and we'd made many a trip together, and he's over to the French coast now, among friends of mine! I only wish——'

His countenance was so fierce as he wished—whatever the wish might be—that Lady Charlotte stopped short in her walk, and stood tremblingly feeling in her reticule for more money. She found a sovereign, with which, in her agitation, she presented him, saying, civilly, 'I really am very sorry for you, but you see you should not—you really shouldn't—be so unforgiving!'

Then, as she beheld the very welcome sight of Neil approaching

with his boatmen, she recovered herself enough to smile a little ; and she said, ' I thought, at one time, that perhaps you were thinking of robbing me, do you know ? '

' Well, I *was* thinking of it,' said the man, carelessly, ' but I didn't know who might be up among the rocks there, or whether that very young gent now in sight mightn't be coming to you ; and, besides, you seemed such a harmless soul to take advantage of. But——'

He stopped suddenly ; his eye lit, and flashed like a signal-gun. ' By ——, there he is ! ' he exclaimed, as he darted down the rough shore. Lady Charlotte looked in that direction, and saw two figures—a man in the garb of a common sailor, and a female neatly dressed in rather a foreign peasant style. They were near enough for her to be perfectly able to distinguish both face and form ; and in the common sailor she recognised—with extreme alarm—the ever-changing adventurer, James Frere—and in the foreign-looking woman, however disguised, most certainly ALICE !

They were landing when she first observed them. On seeing the man who had been the companion of her walk running towards them, they stood still. Then James Frere leaped back again into the boat, holding out his hand to his companion, who lightly followed his example ; and he pushed off from the shore just as the breathless smuggler reached the water's edge. The man shouted and swore ; Frere laughed, and shook an oar menacingly at him. Then a boy lying at the bottom of the boat—and a man in her, whom they had not yet perceived—shook out the sail, and with a bound and a dip in the waters she was off again, soon to appear only like a white speck in the distance !

The smuggler stood a while watching that boat as she danced over the waves. Then he slowly returned to the spot where Neil had rejoined Lady Charlotte.

' Good evening, ma'am,' he said, ' and thank you ! As to yon man, I'll have him yet. His things are all here. He'll need to come back before many days are out—I'll give information.' And he strode away slowly over the sands.

If Lady Charlotte could have doubted the accuracy of her own vision, all doubt would have been removed by Neil, who, flushed and eager, said to her, as he came up, ' There's that man I saw change his clothes in the railway—he's in the boat. I can't mistake him—he has a most strange countenance. It is he—I'll swear to him. Look, Mamma-Charlotte ! '

' Yes,' thought Lady Charlotte, ' and I'll swear to Alice Ross.'

And when she regained the little gate of the 'pastoral' cottage, she passed in very quickly, and told Gertrude the adventure.

'And is it not *too* dreadful, Gertie, his always coming up through a trap-door in this sort of way?—I mean like a demon who comes up, you know, through a trap-door.'

CHAPTER LXIX.

JAMES FRERE IS RECOGNISED BY ANOTHER PERSON.

POOR Lady Charlotte! She was doomed in this tranquil and pastoral retreat to all sorts of agitating scenes connected with the gentleman who thus came up continually, as it were, through a trap-door!

She was standing—as she herself expressed it—'most harmlessly,' talking about the 'getting up' of her fine muslins and embroidered cuffs, with an old washerwoman whose pride it was that 'she was the principallest laundress of these parts, and washed for the principallest gentry by the sea-side.'

The good old soul continued ironing all the time she talked, and looking down with affectionate smiles upon the linen benefited by her manipulation.

'Ah!' she said, 'all the visitors comes to me that *can*; and it's a real treat to me to see the valets, and lady's-maids, and such folk, coming here as civil as need be, a-begging and a-praying of me to give *their* lady or *their* gentleman the preference—for I can't do all. But I mostly prefers the gentlemen's, and some of them be really wonderful! Lord Sinclair's—his be pretty shirts enough to iron—werry smooth soft linen. And Captain Greig's,—them *are* beauties; all worked across the *breastesses*—to be sure how they be worked! And Colonel Vavasour's—his be wonderful, too. And Mr. Gordon's—his'n has little frills down the fronts; they be a deal o' trouble, surely, them little frills; but they're a real pleasure to look at, when the Italian iron's been under 'em. And here's a thing was sent to me to wash,—that looks for all the world like somebody's skin,—but was sent here by a woman they call a West Injian. They did say she was a wild savage—but, if she be a savage, she be wery unlike *my* notion of the creatures, for she's as soft a spoken woman as ever I seed. And she's got this close fit of pink flannel,

to cover her from head to foot, for she has the shivers, with the cold, and she comes from some warm place—I'm sure I forgets the name—but its beyond seas, and there's a governor, and he's as good as a king there . . .

'La! if she ain't coming this minute, and I not half ready.'

The aged washerwoman ironed with redoubled diligence; but before the ironing was done, the door of the cottage was darkened, and in came a sad-looking, sallow woman, past the flower of youth, but still with claims to beauty, her eyes passing languidly over all objects as she advanced, as if nothing in life was much worth noticing, and resting at last in quiet contemplation on the pink flannel garment. You saw at once that she was a Creole, but a gentlewoman.

'Is it finished?' she said, with a soft drawl. 'Give it to me if it is finished.'

The old woman passed a final sweep of the warm iron over the sleeves of the garment in question; flattened, folded, and again passed the iron over; and then, pinning it in a white handkerchief presented it to the new-comer.

As she did so, the threshold of her cottage was again shadowed, and close to Lady Charlotte—close to the Creole—passed in James Frere, followed by Alice Ross, asking about lodgings.

The latter started visibly at the sight of Lady Ross's mother. Fearless as she was her presence of mind forsook her. She grasped James Frere's arm anxiously, and averted her face.

'Oh, come away; come away from this place!' she said in an agitated whisper.

But James Frere was absorbed in another recognition. Another hand lay on his arm, and the languid Creole's eyes were warm with wonder and anger.

'Ah, James, do I see you at last? You cruel James!'

There was an effort on the part of Frere to affect unconsciousness, to affect strangeness; but he also seemed for once, in the bewilderment of the moment, to lose his self-possession.

'Anita!' he exclaimed.

'Yes, you cruel. Anita! And now she has found you, she will not again be left. Oh, James, how could you leave me without one word? To wake and find you gone! Oh James!'

Alice Ross had hitherto stood speechless and motionless; her glittering eyes only seeming to have some movement in them, rippling like a green gleam over the ocean wave. But, as the Creole accompanied the last words by a passionate seizure of Frere's arm, she sprang upon her like a tigress, and shook her off, crying with

shrill anger,—‘Woman, how dare you call my husband JAMES? How dare you call him by his Christian name before *me*, whatever your intimacy may have been?’

‘My intimacy? Your husband?’ laughed the Creole. ‘This man is married as much as law can marry him, to *ME*. I am his wife,—his lawful wife, and I will claim him—for I have a son—even though he deserted me in Jamaica.’

CHAPTER LXX.

AILIE SURPRISED.

THERE was a brief stormy explanation; incontestable and uncontested truths were evolved from Frere’s past history; and at last the Creole, coming close to shuddering Ailie, murmured to her in a voice choked with passion, ‘Are you so mean a spirit? Would you not some revenge? I am his wife. You are nothing but his mistress. Have you children? I have a son. Think not that I will forego my claim. All is not for myself. Will you not prosecute for bigamy, as they can in your country? If not, that will *I* do.’

‘Nothing but his mistress!’ ‘Nothing but his mistress!’ The words beat backwards and forwards in Ailie’s brain. At last she spoke: she hissed the words fiercely through her teeth:—

‘Deny it!’ she said, without looking at him. ‘Deny it!’

‘Nonsense!’ said Frere, contemptuously. ‘You must have known it was so. In the bitter gossip reported to Sir Douglas it was told. You knew it. Don’t be affected. You knew it.’

The light in Ailie’s eyes flickered like a flame of phosphorus.

‘I did *not* know it!’ she said; and then looking the Creole over from head to foot, she said, as if to herself, ‘Did he marry a *slave*?’

‘I am no slave, but a planter’s daughter!’ angrily retorted the Creole, ‘and you had best keep your contempt for your own position. I am as educated as you are—and rich, rich, rich! My father is dead, and I have come to England. I claim my husband; but he shall be punished. My many nights of tears—he shall pay them. I will prosecute him by your laws,—I will prosecute him.’

Ailie looked at the man whose evil influence had joined with *her* evil, to create confusion in her destiny. A chill trembling seized her.

‘Yes,’ she said to Frere, ‘you *shall* suffer! Call vainly on me when your punishment comes—call vainly. I will crush you, I will tread you into the earth. Deceiver!’

Two or three boatmen gathered round the door, attracted by the sound of voices in dispute. Others joined them. Among them came the smuggler. He sprang on Frere, and wrestled and strove to hold him. In a moment a knife glittered in the air; it grazed the bending head of the Creole in its descent, and struck the smuggler’s breast: was lifted once more,—the warm blood dropping from its pointed blade on the women’s dresses and the linen the aged washerwoman had been garrulously gossiping about,—and descended yet more vehemently. They seized him. ‘Devils, let me go!’ he said; and, turning, shook himself free, and fled over the shore.

He was pursued, but not taken. Swift of foot and wiry of limb, he reached an almost inaccessible crag, lifted a huge broken piece of sand-stone, and flung it below,—scattering his pursuers as it rolled down with dust and fragments of the rock from one pointed peak to another, and coming at last with a dead resounding thump upon the shore.

When they looked up, he was gone! Some said he had himself fallen into the ocean, in his frantic efforts to crush those who stood below; some, that he had slid down the smoother side of the cliff, and endeavoured, by swimming and diving, to reach a distant point, where there was a pathway which led to the sea.

But this much was certain, that, stare as they would along the yellow curves and indentations of the sandy shore, or up by the grey rocks where the sea-fowl sat mute or rose screaming into the air, no object resembling a human form dotted the distance.

James Frere was dead, or had escaped. And Ailie, too, had vanished, when Lady Charlotte at last recovered sufficiently from the horrors of the scene to look consciously on objects near her.

Ailie had vanished. Only the Creole woman stood there, wiping her bespattered shoulder and neck, and gazing down as in a dream on the smuggler, stretched on the floor; his strong right hand still vainly clutching the folds of linen he caught as he fell,—caught, as the drowning wretch catches at the bending reed, that goes down with him into the darkness and the depths of overwhelming death.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE BARREN, BARREN SHORE !

It was twilight,—dreary, drizzling, cloudy twilight, such as we sometimes endure with a sort of impatient sadness, even when there is no cause for grief. A twilight that dulls our spirits as it sinks over the leaden sea. Colour gone,—light gone,—warmth gone,—all silent, and wet, and cold. The wind low and hushed : coming in little fitful gusts round the rocks and hollow caves ; puffs of weak vapour ; no freshness, no wildness in the blast ; as if great Nature were, in the words of Shakespeare,—

‘ In all her functions weary of herself.’

The tiny lodgings and cottages by the sea were beginning to darken. One after one the glimmering lights went out. The terrified old washerwoman pulled down her sleeves over her bare arms, and looked round with a shudder at the scoured and mopped floor of her dwelling, before she sat down to supper with two gaping friends who had dropped in to keep her company after the awful event of the day.

Lady Charlotte was recovering from repeated hysterics in the ‘ pastoral cottage ’ covered with roses and honey-suckles ; and leaning her head on Gertrude’s shoulder was watching, with something like a returning smile, the energetic attempts of Neil to make tea and wait on her and his mother. Far away, at the police-station, quivered the gas-light over the door, and with a ghastly brilliancy shone on the closed shutters of the room where the murdered smuggler’s corpse was lying ; waiting for evidence, and coroner’s inquest, and some one to own and identify him, and to take some sort of interest in this sudden destruction of a man in the prime of life and life’s energies.

And duly, by and by, muffled in a shawl—ashamed of her love ; of his fate ; of the brawl with some unknown ruffian, his companion in a lawless trade which her father had disapproved and which had now cost him his life—came the decent farmer’s daughter, the Mary of his obscure love-story, to sob, and sigh, and drop short agitated curtsies when questioned by the sergeant of police, and admit that it was some one she knew ; some one to whose identity ‘ all at home ’ could speak ! And then she went back to the quiet farm and her

parents, and back to her little lonely room : where her half-made wedding-gown lay neatly folded, with thread, scissors, and needle-book on the top of it ; and the bright French silk neckerchief (his last gift) hung over the looking-glass ; and where her Prayer-book and Bible were set on the chest of drawers, with wild flowers drying between their leaves gathered in their pleasant walk the last Sunday, when she had persuaded him to go to church ; that Sunday when her father had shaken hands with him for the first time, and even her mother had asked him if he would stay tea. That happy, quiet Sunday !

And Mary wept and prayed, and wept again. Going through that phase of bitter anguish known to more hearts than hers ; the lament for one whose death is lamented by no one else ; the lament for one, thought by others unworthy, but on whom we ourselves pinned many a hope. Unshared was the grief of her patient heart. She knew that her father and mother were sitting down-stairs talking over the matter in whispers : sorry for their young daughter : but not sorry—rather relieved—that by this stroke of destiny her imprudent love was brought to a close. So she wept, and made her moan,—till, at her tiny lattice window also, the light was put out that made one of the sparks on the land above the shore,—went out, and told no tale of the hopes extinguished within ; nor that a poor simple girl lay sobbing herself to sleep, in the darkness that succeeded.

But on the long cold stretch of the sea-shore stood one who neither wept, nor rested, nor slept.

Ailie was there !

Her head was uncovered to the drizzling rain. Her bonnet, twisted round her slender throat, was clutched at from time to time with restless fingers, as the light puffs of wind waved the dangling ends of the fur. She was shivering ; less with cold than intense nervous excitement ; alternately moving swiftly and pausing ; more cat-like than ever in the dim sad light.

More cat-like than ever ! At one moment she would scud swiftly over the damp sands with soundless footsteps, and be lost behind the cliff. Then with slow, stealthy, deliberate pace, she would emerge, advance a few yards, and stop : motionless and watchful, yet watching nothing : looking over the sea—the objectless, grey, low line of the undulating sea—with a fixed stare ; her eyes gleaming in the faint light ; her spare figure making a sort of shadowy column between sand and sky. And thus she would remain till, all of a sudden, the spirit of swift scudding would awake in her again, and

send her flitting along the shore with such rapidity that the eye lost her, and only became conscious of her reappearance when again the stealthy pace, the objectless pause, the long stare at nothing visible, the slight gesture of the governing hand that would fain keep the boa from imitating the movements of animal life, when stirred by the capricious air,—broke the monotony, and gave something of a less visionary nature to her presence on those gloomy sands.

Oh, very dismal and barren of all hope was that shore to the eyes of Alice Ross ! She might recross the sea in the light sailing-boat which had borne her from France ; she might put countries and continents between her and her native land ; but across the gulf of black thoughts, across the ocean tinged with blood, across the disturbed billows of rage and confusion which tossed her soul, nevermore could she be steered to any quiet haven. Nevermore !

Nor was she dreaming of quiet ; nor desirous of peace ; nor pitying any of the actors or sufferers in the strange tragedy of the morning, except herself ; nor yearning to blot out all that had occurred that day, like a bad dream. Active, restless, full of the supple energy of the animal she so closely resembled ; sharp and feverish were the workings of her busy brain.

Ailie was not thinking of the terrible past ; she was planning a terrible future. She was thinking of James Frere : not as a false lover, a common swindler, a murderer amenable to the laws of his country. No, no ; none of these things. She was thinking of him solely as her PREY.

He had had many a narrow escape, but this time his fate shall doom him. He shall not escape AILIE !

Woe to the man who is loved with the passion that has neither tenderness nor affection to soften it : who is loved not for his own sake, but for the selfish sake of the woman who has mated with him ! The opposite of that love is hate. The serpent hatched from the Egyptian warmth of that sterile soil is vengeance. Pity, and regret, and the sad quiet partings of a humbled heart ; the unutterable and fiery sense of wrong quenched and conquered by a flood of better and holier feelings : all these things are unknown to such women. Their impulse is to slay Jason's children to punish Jason. They fulfil the Scriptural malediction which says, ' Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce ; and their wrath, for it was cruel.'

Ailie thought over the links that had bound her to Frere, and all that she had said, done, and suffered, till a delirium of wild revenge thrilled her brain.

' Don't be affected.' ' You knew it.' ' Nonsense.' These were

the words of insult he had tossed at her before that other woman, the 'Anita,' he had recognised! Words spoken, no doubt, to deceive that Creole wife; perhaps to pave the way for reconciliation with her. She was rich; she had boasted of her riches. Everything over which Alice Ross had power as her own property, she had lent or given to James Frere. The Creole had said that her father was dead; and she was rich, and so had come to England. What though she had spoken angrily at that first meeting? Frere would have power to soften her. He had fled, but it was not clear that he knew that he had *killed* the man he struck at; it was not clear that he knew he was a murderer.

Where could he flee to? that was the question. All his haunts; his tricks of disguise and hiding; his fox-like, craftily-contrived holes; his means of evading and eluding: his daring ways and cunning devices; were they not known to Alice? Had he not himself revealed and boasted of them in the days of their 'love?'

Only one thing for ever marked him: the scar on his cruel right hand.

Yes, he was marked. She was glad of that. That would help others to track him. Others not so well acquainted with his manifold contrivances. She remembered the first day she had ever noticed that scar; the day the Dowager Clochnaben had asked him to sketch some architectural improvements for her grim castle.

She saw him now as in a vision; saw him—as she stood with the drizzling rain damp on her hair, and the leaden sea cold and sad at her feet—seated in the great room at Clochnaben; with all its stately old furniture; its huge comfortable grate, full of pine-logs burning with a scented odour; its heavy shining table, on which lay the maps, and books, and the slanting portfolio with blood-red strings, from which he took the etchings he had made. She saw his smile once more; that smile when their eyes met; the smile, that told her there was more in the soul of that wandering preacher than was taught by his Scriptural texts; and yet she had liked him the better for it, and welcomed with a thrill of passion that irregular and intelligent face as her ideal of male beauty. She saw his hand—that scarred, that *forging* hand—with its light firm touch; and pencil of power, busy in its task that harmless night. She saw it raised and bleeding in the blue lake by the Hut, when he dived for Eusebia's bracelet, and Giuseppe had recognised him and exclaimed against him.

And lastly, in the rapid magic lantern of her shifting visions, she saw him lying in the Highland cottage; simulating to the

simple and pious minister the woes of a blind beggar, and cunningly obtaining his assistance and charitable recommendation. She saw the low sunshine gleam in on the tartan quilt of the lowly bed as she sat by him; illumining the edge of the bed-frame polished and worn by age, the dark green check of the quilt, and the forger's hand; as he held Gertrude's and Kenneth's letters, steadily gazing at the writing with those eyes supposed to be filmed in darkness, preparatory to exerting once again those skilful fingers in their power of imitative art, for the satisfaction of a base revenge on the innocent.

That hand; that thin scarred hand! Clear as the awful image of warning that came out and wrote on the walls of a palace—'Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin,' she saw it rise between her and the sullen sky and cold grey sea that dim and dreary evening. And, as all the passing dreams of her mind faded and vanished, the swift scudding movement returned to her limbs, and flit, flit, flit, went Alice; over the sands, and round the rocks, and up the cliff, and along the narrow pathway; no sound in her footfall, only in the click of the little painted wicket-gate at the garden of the inn where she and Frere had passed the preceding night.

There she paused, and passed in with slackened and furtive tread; looking up at the window of her own room, where a light was still burning. And gathering her dress more closely round her to escape the wet—which dripped from the late autumn roses, and trickled down the cairn-like heaps of huge flints with conch-shells set about them, which formed the chief ornament of that circumscribed Eden—she felt, at last, all the chill which busy thought had deadened as yet to her senses!

So, answering in the negative the question of the sleepy servant-girl, if she would 'take something' before she went to bed, she stole shivering upstairs to rest.

And there—in the very chamber where he of the scarred hand had slept in security the night before—did Ailie lay her head on her pillow, resolved that he should die an ignominious death 'by the laws of his country.' No more meeting with 'Anita;' no more insult to Ailie; but death—death—death—and disgrace.

The lingering light at *her* chamber window burnt long and low; but at length even that sign of wakeful life disappeared—and all along the coast was dark!

The damp drizzle and weak gusty wind of the evening, gradually rose to wild beating rain and wilder storms. The sea rose and the tempest howled. Undermanned and overladen merchant-vessels—whose owners had to think twice before paying port-dues—lost

spars and sails, and drove regretfully past havens of refuge ; and prouder ships rode out the blast, or took shelter where best they might.

But through the storm, as through the calm, Ailie's fearless eye watched the darkness ; and with a fierce compression of her fingers she muttered every now and then,—‘ He shall be hunted down,—hunted down !’

Long she pondered where to begin the feline watch and pitiless chase. He would not surely go back to France ? St. Malo was the haunt of the smuggling companions he had lately consorted with. Would he go to Jersey ? It was too small for hiding, and too probable a place for the searching visit of the police. He would go to London ! In that vast struggling hive, with its eternal murmur of a working, striving, occupied population, any one might hide and be forgotten. He would surely go to London.

So Ailie made her slender package, and was off at dawn of day. Having paid the bill to her nervous landlady before the tardy inquiries of the police as to the young foreign woman who was seen with the murderer the day before,—and whose place of lodging had only just been made out,—disturbed the small household ; filled the taproom with sinister agitation ; and set the hostess herself off in tearful protestations of the extreme respectability of her house ; into which, if her account might be trusted, no foot had ever passed that might not have walked in equal procession with the holiest of saints and martyrs.

To London, then, went Ailie, and set her cat-like watch at many a ruined hole, and saw the walls placarded here and there with the great words MURDER and REWARD, and read in various papers the variously abridged accounts of the event. The long details in *Lloyd's* ; the brief notice in the *Morning Post* ; the stern methodic account in the *Daily Telegraph* ; the tiny corner devoted to ‘ Murder in the Isle of Wight,’ in the superb and overflowing *Times*.

And still, as she read, the hunger of her starved revenge grew keener, and through the streets she knew of old to be his haunts she flitted in the dim foggy evenings, as she had flitted over the sea sands ; her eyes dilating sometimes as she followed with furtive step a figure resembling Frere's to the door of some low lodging in court or alley, only to close, with an exasperated moan of impatience and disappointment, as she slunk back from the aspect of a stranger.

Pains thrown away ; calculations shrewd in vain ; for Frere—that man of shifts and expedients—knew too well that the safe thing

to do under such circumstances is the one thing you are expected *not* to do ; and, while furtive Ailie was prowling wearily through bye-streets and round foggy corners between the Strand and the river, he was sitting fearlessly in gay French theatres and French cafés—his black hair curled and perfumed—dining well and enjoying himself ; ‘ waiting for remittances from Madrid ; ’ and getting all current expenses meanwhile lavishly provided for by a young lordling setting out on his first independent tour, whom he had amused and looked after during a very rough and sick passage to Havre ; and who had already decided that he was ‘ the pleasantest fellow upon earth,’—expressing a hope that (as soon as those remittances should arrive) they might join purses and travel together over the continent.

And James Frere spoke his thanks and made conversation, in very pretty broken English ; for he was a Spanish hidalgo for the nonce, just returned from Mexico. And a gentleman’s linen may certainly be marked ‘ J. F.’ whose name is not James Frere, but Marquis José de los Frios.

So Ailie wandered in vain. The streets, like the sands, were barren ; and the tide of human events washed sluggishly backwards and forwards over the sunken wreck of her life, but brought nothing to the surface !

CHAPTER LXXII.

GERTRUDE MADE JEALOUS.

THE horror with which Lady Charlotte was seized at the idea of any further residence in the pastoral cottage, ‘ where you see, my darling Gertie, we might evidently any day be most likely murdered in our beds,’ was so great, that there was no contesting the advisability of removal ; and their preparations for departure were accordingly made with as close an imitation of Ailie’s haste as the greater multiplicity of objects to be removed rendered possible.

Biting the end of her long ringlet, and trembling very visibly, Lady Charlotte sat watching each successive trunk and carton corded and directed to her town address ; smiling nervously at their lids, and repeating to her maid, ‘ You see, Sansonnet, London is such a nice *safe* place—so safe and nice. I’m sure I wish we were

there! So very safe; so many policemen, and houses, you know, on each side of one, and no back doors—only the area. These pastoral places are dreadfully dangerous. Dear me! Only to think of what I've gone through. And it might have been any of us! You can't tell what that sort of man will do. It's a mercy he didn't take it into his head to stab us all round. And he isn't caught yet; you know they couldn't catch him, which indeed is all for the best; I mean that if they *had* laid hold of him, of course he would have killed them all. So the sooner we get to London the better. But now don't get flurried, Sansonnet; you are crushing down that white crape hat with *bluets* most dreadfully; just lift the lid! You may have the bonnet for yourself that I wore that day, I shall never be able to look at it again. So horrid. Oh, dear me! Do be as quick as you can, my good Sansonnet, and let us get into safety. I never, never will leave London again. It was Mr. Bøyd's idea—not mine in the least. And he said it would do my daughter so much good, and I ask you if it has done her any good at all? Certainly not; only these clever men are so wilful and obstinate. You never can get Mr. Bøyd to have any opinion but his own; a little of his mother in him; a *little* of his mother. Obstinate, you know. And now see what has come of it! Murder has been done, and Gertrude not a bit the better. I'm quite glad to get away, and I shall write to Mr. Bøyd and tell him so. Horrid! And my darling Gertie so patient too, and quite anxious we should start. I shall certainly write and show Mr. Bøyd how wrong he was to advise us to come. Now, Sansonnet, *do* shut the basket trunk! You can iron the dresses, you know, when we get to town, if they are a little crushed. Anything is better than staying among robbers and murderers—anything!

And so the fragile lady chattered nervously on; and never gave her ringlet any rest till she sat on the deck of the steamer for Southampton, with her pretty little fringed parasol held carefully over one of the bonnets that had *not* been present at the murder, smiling at every one and at everything, and repeating from time to time, 'I feel so safe, going back, you know, dear Gertie; don't *you* feel safe and comfortable? And dear Neil,—I'm sure even he is glad to be safe, though of course he was sorry to leave his boat and those horrid gulls. But he is to stuff two of the gulls, and they will be very pretty in the dipping-room. They won't make that screaming either, after they are stuffed. He, he, he!'

And Lady Charlotte gave a little merry tittering laugh after the last observation, for she was under the impression that she had

made a jest; and she felt besides altogether glad and in spirits, escaping thus with life and limb from the dangers of pastoral retirement.

But nothing could make Gertrude Ross feel glad or in spirits. Day by day her melancholy deepened. Day by day her health failed. More beautiful than she had been in early girlhood, her beauty was yet further increased by a transparency of complexion and hectic colour which began now to be habitual.

Her mother saw it with alarm. With alarm she listened to the evasive answers of the physician in attendance; answers evasive and unsatisfactory even to her simple mind, sharpened on this one subject alike by affection and experience. And consoling friends—careless or unconscious of the suffering and fright consequent on their words—told her they ‘feared dear Lady Ross was going the same way her father had gone before her,’ and that they had known many instances of rapid decline in persons who had been made ‘anxious and uncomfortable,’ ‘when the taint was in the constitution, my dear.’

And out of the letters of reproach, appeal, and confused explanation, which Lady Charlotte kept inditing to Vienna, as if Lorimer Boyd was in lieu of Providence, and could keep her daughter alive and well if he only chose to take sufficient pains in the matter, came at last a tender counter-reproach from Lorimer himself; complaining of a certain reticence in Gertrude’s letters to him, giving so little account of her own feelings or state of health.

And out of that again a nervous, repressed, yet anguished answer from poor Gertrude, not absolutely saying, but implying, that he *could not understand* her state of mind. That he—without those dear and intimate ties which were hers, (and yet not hers!) could not be expected to comprehend that her heart was torn up by the roots; and that she seemed to herself to be not so much dying, as already dead, in some respects; dead to all interest in usual things; and sad, even about her deepest interest; her one source of joy and consolation,—her adored Neil. And then came from Lorimer a letter so passionate that the colour flushed to Gertrude’s temples as she read it; scarcely recognising, in its impetuous burst, the grave grim caustic friend, whose reticence on such subjects had always seemed to be far greater than her own.

‘You think then, dear Gertrude (for there is no other possible translation of your letter), that there are bounds to my sympathy for you,—that, in vulgar parlance, I cannot understand you? You have put it gently, carefully, sweetly. Where there is regard (less

regard than that which I trust you feel for me,—your old friend, and your father's friend),—we do all of us endeavour as it were to sheathe our thoughts in soft words; even to those whose intimacy with us enables them to fling away that velvet scabbard, and leave the thoughts as bare, sharp, and wounding, as before they were slipped into their useless covering.

‘The scabbard is worn in vain, for me!’

‘You are mistaken, dear Gertrude! Dear child of the man I loved before you grew to lovely womanhood, you are mistaken! I feel and know all you imagine must be unknown to me. Do you think *I* have lived till now and never loved? Do you think I have not also experienced how difficult it is to bend one's mind even to wholesome hopes, before the hour-glass of sorrow is well turned, or its sand has begun to fall? That I do not know how miserable a thing it is to struggle with the clinging thought that one might yet be blest with reconciling love,—instead of being obliged to give a person up utterly? The difference between imprisonment and death! The one a prolonged torture, the other only a merciful blow. Do you think I am unacquainted with that sensation of utter indifference to all subjects and events which bear no relation to the object painfully beloved? With that consciousness, that, for aught we care, the earth might crumble with all upon it, as long as standing room was left for two?’

‘I tell you that I know that love! I know the power that makes all other vexations seem like the raving of a far-off storm to one that sits safely sheltered. The power that can build, as it were, round the human heart walls so massive that the indistinct thing is the thunder of the world's tempests,—while near, and dear, and sweetly audible, sounds the voice whose low music thrills every pulse of our being.’

‘My dear Gertrude, do not doubt me. You are so much to me, —*even as we are*,—that my life would be barren, but for the belief that I am something to you. Do not write me letters reserved in their sorrow and their fears. They make me feel like a miserable alien. I call to you at such times, but there is no echo. I look for you, but I cannot find you! Tell me you think you are dying—tell me your heart is breaking for this miserable madness in our ever dear Douglas (which one day *must* have an end!)—but do not exile me from your confidence, and bid me stand, after so many years of intimate companionship,—far off, among the group of common friends, who are left to conjecture your sufferings and ask news of you in vain.’

When Lorimer Boyd had despatched his letter, he would have given much to rewrite it. Especially he regretted, yea, was inwardly stung by the memory of the phrase, '*even as we are.*' Would she take it as an allusion to his concealed love for her? Would she notice it, not in words, but by a yet further evidence of reserve in her correspondence? He stood, grim and gloomy, looking over the Bastei on the dotted dwellings of the Viennese suburbs, ashamed, and angry with himself. Would his letter seem importunate and distasteful? Had he said so much, only to produce estrangement between them instead of increased confidence? Ah! idiot that he had been to pass the boundary line he had set himself for many a long year, and change from the tone of habitual gravity or *persiflage*, to plunge into passionate phrases that might draw down on him a repulse, however gently given!

He tormented himself needlessly. Tender, and soft, and thankful, were all the words of Gertrude's answer. Tender, and utterly unconscious! One timid sentence,—expressive of a certain degree of surprise that any one he had 'honoured with his love' should have failed to respond,—he found there; and one simple allusion to the very phrase he had almost cursed himself for writing; that '*even as we are,*' which had been such a burden of hot lead in his thoughts. She took that phrase to mean the distance that separated them as contrasted with their constant companionship in former days; and promised to tell him all, 'even as if we were sitting consulting together, as in the old happy days, in the pretty room of the Villa Mandórlo, how best to spare Sir Douglas pain about Kenneth.'

And Lorimer, relieved, and half-satisfied, fell back on his old style of letter-writing, and spake no more of pining love or wild enthusiasms. Common topics, passing jests, indifferent discussions, again filled the many pages that travelled from the distant *chancellerie* to the white hand that broke the seal so languidly, and the sweet eyes whose lids grew heavier each succeeding day.

He strove to interest and amuse; to jest with her, as men will do (and women too) who feel that they have been on the verge of a dangerous confession of an attachment that never can prosper, or which never should have been avowed.

'Vienna is very dull,' he said, 'so at least I am told. It is at all events very empty. I think of wearing a coat of skins and a conical cap; such as Robinson Crusoe is represented in; and going about with a poll parrot on my finger, looking for a footprint in the Prater or public drive. Mrs. Cregan was here for a short time with her pretty daughter: the mother the most admired of the two. Though

indeed, a fair beauty of Viennese society with a most German wealth of hair, insisted that the luxuriant brown plaits of the English stranger were 'postiches.' But going to the Opera a little hurried and dishevelled was considered tantamount to having walked over red-hot ploughshares, and Mrs. Oregan came off triumphant and completely cleared. The Opera is my sole pleasure! You know how I love music; and though the voices sound thin after the full-throated bubbling richness of Italian singing, these people are on the whole better musicians.

'A backward people, too. We had an alarm of fire the other night, and a prodigious *incendie* it turned out to be. A whole convent burned down. Anything worse than the arrangements for getting water on such an occasion, it is impossible to conceive. Here, with the Donau carrying the Danube into the heart of Vienna, it was brought in *barrels*, such as serve to lay the dust in other cities: The fright of the crowd was extreme; and the rushing about of water-carts and engines, with men standing up in them, holding immense pine-torches, scattering sparks and flakes of fire, as if handing about samples of the destruction going on wholesale, made a picture very strange and not very edifying to my unaccustomed eye.

'I heard an interesting anecdote at the Hospital for the Insane. A poor young lady there, quite mad, but gentle ("mad for being forsaken," as her attendant assured me), had yet so much of rational system left in her bewildered brain, that she regularly and daily taught the child of one of the keepers to write and read,* and heard her lessons with the most methodical care. I was much touched by the story; that wandering mind, unfit to associate with grown-up people, still keeping so far in advance as to be of use to an ignorant child; shut out, too, from usual companionship on earth, and (according to our views) irresponsible for her actions in the eye of Heaven, yet able to train another mind in some degree to knowledge and duty.

'I will tell you nothing more to-day, but you are to tell me all about yourself and your health. ALL, or I shall write and complain to Lady Charlotte, who always writes and complains to me, when you are not well, till she has almost brought me to think it is somehow my fault when you cough or have had bad headaches.

'Yours ever,

'LORIMER BOYD.'

And in the process of their 'infamous correspondence,' as Lady

* Fact.

Clochnaben had termed this interchange of letters, Gertrude did struggle to tell him all,—all that she felt or feared for herself, for Neil, for her gentle little mother, and much of what she felt and feared about Sir Douglas.

Only one thing Gertrude kept buried in her heart, and yet it was the bitterest pang of all. She had grown jealous. A new miserable pain had risen like a flickering tongue of fire, and scared where it touched.

Sir Douglas had been very ill, very unwell; the hardships that were trying so many fine constitutions round him, and were borne so bravely by all, told on a frame stricken by anxiety and vexation. His eyes, too, had suffered. He had scarcely been able to read or write for some time. In this condition he had, he said, received much kindness from one of the officers' wives who had come out to join her husband. He did not say much of this lady, except that she sang to him. She 'had one of the sweetest voices he had ever heard,' and had written some of his letters for him.

Human nature is human nature, and dreadful as it used to be to Gertrude to think of her husband lonely in his sadness and suffering, it was more dreadful still to dwell on the picture thus conjured up of his being tended, consoled, charmed by another.

All day long, and in her mournful dreams, Gertrude's feverish imagination dwelt on the circumstances. What was she like, this rival unknown, who took her place, and usurped her duties? She must be young and fair. Voices fade, like all other things; the most melodious tones grow flat and hoarse and weak in age, and this was 'one of the sweetest voices Sir Douglas had ever heard.' ONE of the sweetest. 'Oh! had he yet some memory of hers? Had he forgotten the Sabbath singing, so cruelly commented upon by the Dowager Clochnaben and the hypocrite James Frere, when she, his wife, soothed the hours made weary with the same pain as now, and the same deprivation of common occupation?'

Could he hear sweet singing and forget hers? Forget his own praises, his own emotion, and how his first declaration of love had been at Sorrento, the sequel, the blessed sequel, to a song that died away into silence over the moonlit sea?

How often since had he praised her voice! How often! 'Was that praise now the portion of another? Was he to love again? To be loved as *she* had loved him?'

She had her visions, like Ailie, but oh, how different! She saw her noble Douglas in those blessed happy days. She saw the dreamy love in his eyes while listening to some favourite ballad: the

silent thankful smile of approval and delight as it ended. She felt the pressure of his cordial hand.

Once, so vivid and so painful was the vision of all this given to another, that with a sharp wailing cry she stood up in her lonely chamber, extending her arms in despair; calling wildly on the absent,—‘Oh love! oh husband! oh Douglas!’ till Lady Charlotte came in, flurried and frightened, in her white muslin dressing-gown, and asked her what had happened; and pitied her, but also scolded her, for ‘letting her mind dwell so on a man who after all had been so *very* ungrateful and foolish; yes, *foolish*, she must say so, and she didn’t care who heard her, or thought the contrary; and she wished she had never seen Sir Douglas, nor Kenneth, nor any of the Rosses, for they were worse than ghosts or demons, and had brought nothing but misfortune into the family.’

And all this Gertrude kept in her aching heart when writing to Lorimer, as he kept also in his angry heart the announcement of the same news by his mother, who triumphed and sneered, and called Sir Douglas ‘a very gay old gentleman,’ and said, ‘it was a pity when folk didn’t know their own mind; and if they chose to have young wives instead of just being content with a good nurse and a flannel nightcap, they should put up more quietly with the consequences: that was *her* dictum.’

CHAPTER LXXIII.

FRERE'S LODGINGS DETECTED.

THE most humble instruments are sometimes the means of Heaven’s perpetual wrath.

In the midst of Frere’s charming *séjour* at Paris, his daily feasts, his nightly carouses, his ‘quips and cranks and wreathed smiles,’ and delightful companionship with his wealthy young dupe: a little commonplace accident once more sent him into space, a forlorn and hunted vagabond, ready for all chances which Ailie might prepare, or his luckless destiny entail on him.

The young lordling looked out for a courier ‘with excellent recommendations.’ He found one. The courier especially recommended to him,—an Italian, speaking very good English and French; active, energetic, and having lived already not only as a courier but in

regular service in an English family; an affectionate devoted sort of fellow, who had nursed his master in illness, and energetically attended him in health,—presented himself for examination and inspection.

The lordling was pleased, and so was the courier. The engagement was made; the day of departure fixed; the route planned, and nearly decided upon.

To end all uncertainty on this latter point, the ‘most amusing fellow in the world,’ the Marquis de los Frios, who was to be travelling companion and friend on the occasion, was called in.

The courier looked eagerly at the Marquis, and his countenance fell.

The Marquis also looked at the courier.

‘Signor Frere!’

The mock Marquis would fain have braved out the recognition; but to be recognised now was not the light matter it might have been in former days. He stood his ground with admirable self-possession while in the presence of the courier and his new master. If a man could have been cheated out of his very senses, the courier would have faltered in his conviction, so perfect was Frere’s unconscious bearing; so excellent his broken English mixed with words of Spanish origin. But the courier was our old friend Giuseppe, the coral diver of Naples. His bold, sunburnt, honest, handsome countenance quailed not, nor altered one jot as he gazed in Frere’s face.

When the latter left the room ‘to fetch a journal in which there were maps of the route he had formerly taken by Switzerland to Italy,’ Giuseppe rapidly and resolutely laid bare all he knew of the impostor thus suddenly met again after a pause of years. The incredulity of the lordling was great—so great, that with the happy sauciness of boyhood he rose at last, saying. ‘Will you stay here, my good fellow, and let Los Frios just confront you, and put you down with an unvarnished account of himself? If you weren’t yourself a foreigner, you’d know that this gentleman couldn’t be English; couldn’t, because he hardly speaks English well enough to be understood, unless one was used, as I am, to this sort of lingo.’

And so the young lord left Giuseppe, patiently waiting; and did not try his patience long, but returned in about five minutes with a puzzled exclamation of ‘By Jove!’ which comprised all he liked to say on the occasion, having found Frere, *alias* Los Frios, departed; and a pencilled note in a very neat gentleman-like hand, informing him, that remittances *not* having yet arrived from Madrid, and these sort of stories being embarrassing for a stranger, and most difficult

to disprove in a place where one had no acquaintances, he had thought it best to renounce the idea of their mutual tour, and go at once to Spain. That he was sure, under the circumstances, his friend would find no fault with his availing himself of a portion of a bag of Napoleons obtained for travelling purposes the day before. He had not yet counted the pieces he had borrowed, but would do so in the railway carriage, and strenuously advised him to be very cautious as to the man who had pretended to recognise him (Frere), for he never saw the man before in his life, and he must have had some motive in thus endeavouring to get rid of a third party on their travels.

And now James Frere did really come to London, having cleverly managed to *derouter* the police in Paris, by taking a ticket by rail for Madrid, and ostentatiously showing himself at the proper station for such a start.

How or when he disappeared from that station no one could have said. But an infirm old gentleman arrived by the Havre packet for Southampton the night of that day, and from Southampton went to London, very anxiously and timidly asking his fellow-passengers to recommend some quiet hotel, and advise him about lodgings, having just arrived from America on anxious business which might detain him some time in the great metropolis. And he also begged to know where was the best place to get American money changed, for, though he had, of course, bills on bankers in England, yet he would be glad to get dollars and such like turned into silver; as to Australian sovereigns, he believed they were good and correct for use in England. And both dollars, and notes, and sovereigns were displayed, and much good-natured assistance tendered in the way of advice; and the infirm old gentleman accepted the card of one of his advisers, who kindly offered to call next day, and see if he was comfortable, and if he could do anything for the stranger; and then the old gentleman got into a cab, and was driven to an eating-house, from which, having taken some refreshment, he sauntered forth on foot, and turned to cross Waterloo Bridge. He paused on the bridge, and leaned over, looking into the water. Wrapt in contemplation he seemed, and of a sorrowful character, for he often sighed, and covered his face with his hands.

And as the various passengers over the bridge passed on, and others succeeded, a magical change came over his face, and, when he turned once again to cross the bridge in the opposite direction, though still elderly, he was no longer infirm, but a jolly, radiant sort of a personage, who looked about him, and could have taken

part at a moment's notice in a frolic or a fray, and paid a saucy compliment to any unprotected female he met.

But Ailie saw him! patient was the watch she kept, as he tried one lodging after another; patient the ear that listened when he told the landlady where at last he fixed himself, that he was 'dining out with some friends, and would return at night,' and handed her an earnest in advance on the price of his lodgings before he walked away. The red cross that marked the doors in the fatal days of the Great Plague of London told no surer tale of certain death and misery, than the invisible notice from Ailie's watchful gaze on the door of that house.

At last! At last he was earthed. Another night; or less; *half* a night; enough of night to put an end to whatever wassail he was about to engage in, and bring him back to the trap set for him, and shut out all hope of escape.

She had only now to go and communicate with the police.

That was all.

And with the swift scudding that took her over the long sands by the Black Gang Chine, she threaded her way through the crowd, reached the police station, and laid her information.

Frere's lodging was detected. His fate was sealed.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

AILIE DAFFLED.

It is not only in pleasant things that the proverb holds good, 'There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip,' Ailie was doomed once more to be disappointed. Frere never returned to those lodgings: although the forfeit money remained with his expecting landlady, and that personage, after pondering much over the question, 'Why tarry the wheels of his *cab*?' supplied his place with another lodger; keeping a pleasant little apology ready cut and dry, to be offered (with her unlet second floor) should the defaulter turn up in a few days, and the delay turn out to be 'a case of illness or something.'

But Frere was by no means ill. His wavering star was once more for a while in the ascendant. He had made another *rencontre* as he walked towards the parks, certain not to be recognised.

He met his Creole wife.

She was walking, handsomely dressed, from the gate of Kensington Gardens to a carriage.

He did exactly what Ailie had conceived possible: he resolved to appeal to her compassion.

'Stop, for God's sake,' he whispered. 'I am James Frere; I have wandered in disguise for days, in hopes to see you' (this was a pleasant fable). 'You can denounce me; but I am your son's father; a miserable man' (here she paused, and faltered in her march onward. He saw it, and continued eagerly and sadly); 'a man worn out with life's struggles; ready to die, but not by the hangman's hands. Turn back into the garden! Give me ten minutes for dear life's sake. You shall never be troubled with me more, Anita, after that!'

Abject, humble, imploring; the great dark eyes she dared not meet, fixed in greedy scrutiny and hope of pity on her downcast face.

She paused—she hesitated—she turned and re-entered the gardens with Frere at her side. He led to a solitary bench under some trees; and there he pleaded with the woman who had once loved him, and mourned his desertion with bitter tears.

Plausible, fiery, eloquent,—a most consummate master of all the tricks of speech by which favour can be won or condemnation averted; he made way once more into the yielding heart that listened. He falsified his whole life; his reasons for leaving her, his trials and persecutions, his long imprisonments, the anger of her relations. As to love, he had known other women, but never really loved except herself. He asked for no love—only aid to escape to America or the West Indies. She could give it. She could be his saviour, his guardian angel. Some day, when her boy was old enough to understand, he would bless her a thousand times over for saving *him* from the heritage of indelible shame consequent on the disgrace and despair of his father. The smuggler's death need not be the horror to her that it was to the Englishwomen who witnessed it. Only in England is such a calm value set on human life. Thousands of soldiers die on the field as suddenly. Every bullet has its billet. He did not mean to slay the man, but to shake himself free; he was maddened and bewildered by meeting *her*. He scarce knew what he did at the time. Any way, if he was the veriest wretch that ever burdened earth, she had loved him once, and by that love and by her child's life he besought her pity! And nothing more. So that, in the onward years when she was happy and blest,—she might think of the miserable wanderer who had gone to die

in the Far West, and rejoice that she, at least, had had compassion in the sorest need of his hunted and persecuted life.

'I live,' she said at last, 'in Manchester Square. Take an apartment near there, and I will come and see you, and talk of possible things and ships that will sail soon.' There was a pause, and she added in a low voice, 'Do not be miserable.'

Do not be miserable. *She* did not belong to the class of women who slay Jason's children to punish Jason. She had melted. The exulting blood bounded in the man's heart. Gaining so much he might yet gain more.

But Ailie had also thought over 'possibilities.' And among those possibilities she classed the meeting with this lost Anita. She had ascertained her name, or the name she went by, from the people of the hotel in the Isle of Wight, and her address in London.

The day came, and the hour, when Frere was once more within reach of the cat-like spring. He had not left in any ship. He was in the lodging near Manchester Square, and Ailie, prowling near the Creole's house, saw her go forth in the late dim hours always in one direction. Then she made sure that Frere would fall into her hands. She watched—and watched—and watched.

Oh! not in vain this time. She saw him: saw him looking from the balcony of a well-built comfortable house, and saw the Creole enter.

Ailie never prayed, or she might have prayed then to keep her senses, so fluttering and leaping were the pulses of her heart and brain. Afraid to leave and miss him as on that former occasion, she stood wistfully considering, and looking about for a policeman on his beat to call the detective who was watching in Manchester Square.

She saw one advancing, and went swiftly up to him. She spoke in a hurried breathless tone: 'In there,' (pointing to the house) 'lives the man who committed that murder in the Isle of Wight; you will get a reward: here is the placard, go in and take him.'

While the man stood hesitating, muttering something in a doubtful and surprised tone about 'a warrant,' and 'speaking to the sergeant of the force,' the Creole passed out again. Her veil was down, and she moved slowly and sadly with her handkerchief to her face as though weeping. Her dress brushed lightly against Ailie's as she went by, and the latter drew back from the contact with an angry shudder.

'Go in now; the servant girl is still standing at the open door: there is a large reward, I tell you. Here is your sergeant coming.'

The detective at this moment joined them. The two men

advanced, and Ailie followed. They passed together up the stairs and opened the door of the sitting-room. Frere sat at the writing-table, with his back to them, apparently too intent on his occupation to notice the intrusion.

The detective moved forward a pace or two, touched him on the shoulder, and stepped back again, as if prepared for any show of resistance he might offer. But nothing of the kind seemed impending. He rose quietly and silently, and turning round slowly, faced Ailie Ross. She gave a cry, and darted to the door.

'It is not the right person,' she exclaimed. 'They have changed clothes; he has escaped! Follow him; he cannot have gone far! *This is a woman!*'

'Yes,' said the Creole, as she fixed her large dark eyes scornfully on Ailie. 'I am a woman, though I wear the garb of a man; and you, you are a digress perhaps, though you wear the *garb of a woman*. He saw you from his balcony. He saw you!'

CHAPTER LXXV.

GERTRUDE IS CALLED TO A STRANGE SICK BED.

It was some days after this strange scene that Gertrude was lying quietly on the sofa in Lady Charlotte's drawing-room on a Sunday evening; reading extracts with Neil from an album lent to him by Mrs. Cregan.

'Mother, darling,' the boy said with a smile, 'this is just the book for you. Here's a whole batch of things about the Poor.

'Treatment of the Poor in Workhouses; Improvidence of the Poor: Texts recommending the Poor to our loving Care; Debts of the Poor, and Payment by instalments; Amusements of the Poor. Oh, I say, I like that,—*amusements* of the poor! Do they go to plays and pantomimes, I wonder? Oh, no,—here it is,—it's all about walks and fresh air, and opening of gardens and so forth. Here, here's rather an interesting bit; I'll read it to you, darling mother you lie still. Is your shawl over your feet? Not too heavy? Good. Now then, here goes. It is somebody writing about opening the Botanical Garden in Edinburgh on Sundays, and he says:—

'I think that when the educated undertake, even "on principle," to curtail the innocent pleasures of the uneducated, they should con-

sider whether the deprivation is the same to the two classes. I affirm that it is *not* the same. The educated man, the scholar, has perpetual gardens in his memory, in his books, in association of cultivated ideas. The uneducated or half-educated man depends on the positive, on the visual, for enjoyment; and in a still more intense measure do the poor require the positive and visual. An educated scholar may pass a Sunday in his study easily, in meditation and prayer. A poor mechanic *cannot*. The other is richer than he. Not only richer in the fact that he has a warmer house, more adorned apartments, the power of ordering some vehicle if the weather be downpouring when he wishes to shift the scene,—but richer in *ideas*. The educated man condemns the uneducated man to a certain number of blank hours when he deprives him of outward associations. Set a child to meditate. A child *cannot* meditate, nor bear the oppression of unoccupied time beyond a very brief period. Neither can the poor man. His holiday is as necessary to his soul as a meal to his body. His hungry spirit lives on simple things. Your educated mind feeds on complex things, which he cannot obtain. Like the sick man,

‘The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him are opening Paradise.’

‘It may be a fit occupation for *you* to sit through the day without such refreshment. You see the wonders of God in thought. Let him see them where God set them for His simpler creatures. The flowers that bud and die, holding a sermon in their very hearts,—the grass that withereth away like a man’s life,—is the contemplation of such things a sinful pleasure, because to him a more intense and rare enjoyment than to you? When he beholds with wonder the pitcher-plant,—emblem of the fountain in an arid desert,—can you make *him* consider it a common thing, as it is to you who have seen it and read of it a hundred times? Or will seeing that wonder of God on his one leisure day make him less pious, less inclined to muse on the works of God, the Creator, in such spare moments as he has?

‘I repeat it, the educated and uneducated do not meet on even terms, in these denials of recreation.

‘That which is pleasure to you, to them is nought—a strain of thought that only perplexes. You cannot fill the weak vessel with that spiritual wine; it would break and burst. God made religion simple; a thing for babes and sucklings; to comfort the dying cottager; to be a hope to the ignorant beggar. Man makes religion

complex ; and spins cobwebs of his own thin laws round the broad and manifest law of God. Those who take Scripture texts for warrant against innocent Sabbath recreation, are like those who take Scripture texts to prove that they know the set term and duration of this mortal globe. As, in the very book from whence prophecies are culled to prove at what date our world shall be destroyed, we are expressly told that God keeps that secret even from the angels,—so, in the very book Sabbatarians quote, they are expressly told that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

‘For those who would argue on the wretched narrow ground of mere task-work ; who say, “Oh ! we can’t have gardens opened where watchers and gatekeepers must be employed,” there is an answer so easy that it is a wonder so much dispute can be maintained on such a sandy foundation.

‘Parks, gardens, lodges,—houses with gatekeepers, gardeners, porters, and servants,—are in constant occupation all over Great Britain on the Sabbath day. If the poor man may not have his walk in the Botanical Garden because a gatekeeper must let him in,—why should a fine lady’s coachman drive her to church, or for an airing ? Why should any servant in any house be troubled with any common duty ? Why should not the whole machinery of life stand still till Monday morning ? If the answer be, ‘These other things are necessary ; the poor man or mechanic’s walks in these gardens are not,’—I say, neither are the things of which I made mention necessary ; they are harmless, they are habitual, but they are *not* necessary. Some are positive luxuries ; all bear an exact analogy to the recreation for which the occupying of a few gatekeepers is required.

‘In the city of Edinburgh, where so fierce a denunciation against harmless Sabbath recreation is for ever going on ; group after group of filthy drunken creatures lie lounging in the public way, to the scandal and dread of the passers-by,—even on and about flights of steps leading to chapels where their most eloquent men and earnest preachers rivet the attention of more decent hearers.

‘Such groups are never seen on Continental Sabbaths ; not even in Paris, that most dissolute of cities ; and in the country towns and villages of foreign lands such scenes are positively unknown.

‘These stricter Sabbath rules, and the vehement battle of sects as to how to keep God’s day holy, do not make Scotland a more moral country. Drunken in a greater measure than other countries,—fierce in crime,—she can scarcely point to the evidence of her training, as proof of the success of her theories ; and, peradventure,

it would be a blessed change there, if, in lieu of Sabbatarian discussion, there was such Sabbath recreation as might lead the mind of man neither to sensual pleasure nor to burning disputation, but to those scenes which lift him—

“From nature up to nature’s God.”

‘Well, now, I think that is all very true,’ observed Neil, as he paused to take breath. ‘Don’t you think it is true, darling mother?’

‘Yes, I do, Neil. I think it true, and just, and I heartily wish it could become the universal opinion!’

‘Ah! yes, but there are such pig-headed people in the world! People whose understandings really seem to be turned upside down. Lady Clochnaben, mother, is an upside down woman. She is always wrong, and always thinks she is right. It is a pity we can’t pack a few moderate sensible thoughts on the top of her mind, and then ticket her, “This side uppermost.” But she will never be converted.’

Neil paused a moment, and then added, with a slight degree of hesitation:—

‘I think a woman should be very kind and gentle. I don’t know what would become of the poor at Clochnaben and Torrieburn if it were not for Effie and Mrs. Ross-Heaton. They can’t give much money, you know, but Effie reads, and Mrs. Ross-Heaton makes capital broth for them, and altogether they are very good to them. And mother, do you know I overheard Mrs. Cregan speaking of *you* yesterday to Lorimer Boyd, when he called after arriving in London from Vienna. She said she thought you looked so ill; but you were still busy, and she believed a special blessing from God would rest on your head, because of your unwearied goodness to the poor.’

A slight flush tinged Gertrude’s cheek and brow.

‘My boy, Mrs. Cregan is a very generous warm-hearted woman; and she says many kind things of me and others.’

‘But don’t you believe it, mother? Don’t you believe in the special blessing? I do. They thought I was not attending, but I heard her. Those were her very words. I do think, when your dear name is mentioned, I sprout a couple of extra ears; I seem to have four instead of two. I can hear all down a long dinner-table if they speak of you. And I feel so proud of you, mother; I know you are so good, so far beyond all other women. I feel I could thank God every day for making me your son and my father’s.’

A moan escaped the pale lips he bent to kiss; and that wild

appeal—‘Oh! my Neil!’ which Lady Charlotte had complained was spoken ‘in a tone that made one’s heart ache,’ and was ‘so unreasonable, and so unlike dear Gertie,’ once more puzzled and pained the sensitive lad by her side.

He was silent for a minute or two. He asked for no explanation; but bent anew over his book. A smile played presently round his full young mouth. ‘Oh, mother, here is such a quaint little bit. I must read it to you. Listen now. I don’t know what it is about except that it is still something respecting the poor. It is quoted from some very old pamphlet called the “Petition of the Poor Starving Debtor,” printed in 1691, and advising that we should subscribe to pay the debts of the poor. And it says, “Such charity is an act of great piety towards Almighty God; who requireth it of us. For He hath left the poor as His pupils or wards, and the rich as His stewards or guardians, to provide for them. It is one of those great tributes that He justly requires from the rest of mankind, which, because they cannot pay Him, He hath scattered the Poor amongst them to be His substitutes and receivers.”

‘And here’s a little bit against pride; a curious little bit: saying, that in Charles the First’s time, noblemen and gentlemen thought it a very good provision for their younger sons, to bind them apprentice to the rich merchants.

‘Well, I can’t say I should like to be taking an inventory of bales of silk and sacks of coffee instead of shooting and fishing at Glenrossie. I think if I had lived in that mercantile day I should have taken my cat, like Whittington, and gone to seek my fortune.’

‘It was the cat that went; Whittington stayed in London,’ said Gertrude, smiling; ‘so you would have had to be patient and industrious before you even came to be Lord Mayor; which seems to have been then considered what the present population of Paris deem it now: the greatest dignity in the world.’

‘Well, I trust I should have attained to it; and Effie and I would have come to visit you in long crimson and blue robes as represented in the story books. Poor Effie! I hope a letter will come to-morrow. Cousin Kenneth was scarcely so well when she last wrote.’

Gertrude sighed, and leaned back on her pillow. Thought, which is lightning quick, once more took her through those days at the Villa Mandorlo, and the more fatal scenes at Glenrossie, and so floated her soul away to her lost Douglas; and his health; and the singing of that unknown,—whose voice ‘was one of the sweetest he had ever heard.’

Neil, too, sat musing. His boyish spirit was out far away over the hills, in the moonlight, bidding weary little Cousin Effie a sorrowful good-bye.

So there was deep silence in that luxurious room, where the clear boyish voice with its earnest intonation had been lately reading those extracts respecting the poor. Silence deep and unbroken.

All of a sudden the door was hurriedly opened, and Lady Charlotte with an open note in her hand, and an expression of anxiety and perplexity on her weak little face, came in exclaiming—‘Now I do hope and insist, Gertie, that you spare yourself, and don’t go!’

‘Don’t go where, little mother?’

‘It is a letter from that widow, the mother of Jamie Mackinnon who used to be at Torrieburn, you know, that poor Mr. Heaton was so good to——’

‘Yes, dear mother; she has had to struggle for a livelihood lately. I have seen a good deal of her. She is doing better. Jamie’s apprenticed; and she takes in lodgers in an humble way.’

‘That’s just it, Gertie, that’s just what’s so ungrateful. I mean after you have helped her, and put her in a way of having lodgers, to send for you in this sort of way to see one of them! Why should you see a lodger? I want you to rest, and take care of yourself, and she sends urgently requesting you to see lodgers! Pray don’t see a lodger. Let her send for the doctor. That’s much better.’

‘Let me see her note, dear mother,’ said Gertrude, with a smile, half weary and half compassionate. ‘If any one is ill I ought to go—it is in my district.’

‘District! Now, my own darling Gertie, *are* you a clergyman? Besides, a lodger does not belong to *any* district; and you see she says he is *strangely ill*: well, is not that more the doctor’s business than yours? If he’s *strangely ill*, you may not know what to do, or what is the matter with him, a bit better than she does; and it may be something catching. And it’s a man. I wouldn’t mind so much if it were a woman; but really, after the Isle of Wight—though to be sure there are not so many smugglers in London, only I think—oh, Gertie, *don’t go!*’ exclaimed Lady Charlotte, getting quite entangled in the network of her own rapid sentences, and suddenly breaking off, ‘Don’t, *pray* don’t!’

But Gertrude had risen from her sofa, and stood folding the note in her fingers, and looking very grave and resolute. She stooped and kissed her mother’s cheek tenderly, and said, ‘Do not be over

anxious for me, my mother. If it were God's will that I should suffer for doing His work, I should not escape by neglecting it. I solemnly promised—(and I am only one of many who visit in the same way)—that I would come, when called, to the sick or dying. The person lodging with Mrs. Mackinnon appears to be dying, and dying very miserably and uncomfortably; he has told her he has not a friend in the world. I must go to him. When the doctor comes I shall return. Do not fear for me more to-day than any other day.'

'You look more weary to-day—worse than ever,' said poor Lady Charlotte, with half a sob.

'I was a good deal agitated talking over matters with Lorimer Boyd, you know; I had not seen him for a very long time. But I have been lying down, and am quite rested and strong again. Neil has been reading to me.'

'Ah! I am sure *he* doesn't think you ought to risk your health in the way you do!'

The boy looked eagerly up from his book, as if he had not caught the drift of the reference made to him. His mother smiled.

'Neil, on the contrary, has got a beautiful creed from Mrs. Cregan, that a special blessing rests on me during these visits.'

Neil started to his feet, and threw his eager arms round her.

'I *do* believe it; I do believe God keeps special blessings for those who are like you. You always seem to me like one of the beautiful pale saints in pictures, and what you think right to do, seems to me the only right. God bless your visit, and you, dear mother. May I come?'

'No, my Neil; but I will not be long away.'

Not long? It seemed to Lady Charlotte an interminable visit; and her prophecy of evil was apparently fulfilled to the letter, when a hurried pencilled note came from her daughter, saying that the person she had visited was said to have a bad sort of fever, and she thought best, for Neil's sake, not to return home at all, till the medical man had made out what ailed him.

More Gertrude did not tell that weak but loving mother. For what there was to tell besides, would have driven her half-distracted with pain and terror!

When Lady Ross reached the obscure lodging where Mrs. Mackinnon earned her scanty livelihood, she found the poor old Scotch-woman in a panic scarcely to be described. She led her,—thanking her at every step,—up the little creaking staircase into the small clean room. There, stretched on a bed, panting, with swollen features, his head so closely shaved as to be entirely bald, and a long

auburn wig dank and soaked with water, on the pillow by him,—lay 'the lodger' whom she had been called to see. He had fallen in the river, Mrs. Mackinnon said, and all his things were wet; and she had not known he wore a wig till it slipped off; and she had left it there, not daring to touch anything: afraid of the man.

'Do you feel very ill? Do you wish any one sent for, who would know you? Have you no friends with whom I can communicate? Medical assistance will be here directly.'

So spoke the sweet grave voice; and the sweet serious eyes waited to see the wretched being turn and answer, if indeed he was sensible.

In a moment he turned with a struggle, grasping the bed-clothes with his hand; sat upright in bed, and looked wildly in Gertrude's face.

His aspect was inconceivably horrible. A sort of purple pallor overspread his skin; his bald head gave yet darker expression to his great lustrous eyes; his mouth was swollen and half open; he had the expression of one who strives with a frightful dream. She had seen him before; but where?

Gertrude gazed, wondering; she endeavoured to command herself, but nature was too strong; she suddenly gave a wild shriek, and covered her face with her hands.

'Don't leave me! don't abandon me! have pity!' gasped the man, clutching now at her dress. 'Something ails me more than common—some horrible stroke of death. Don't leave me, and I'll make you bless the hour—don't!'

Gertrude slowly uncovered her face.

'Fear nothing from me,' she said; 'I will neither leave you, nor betray you. I know you. You are JAMES FRERE!'

A groan was the only answer; but there was a look of wild appeal in his eyes, such as the hunted stag at bay gives when the dogs have fastened their fangs in his side.

'I won't leave you till the doctor comes,' repeated Gertrude; 'and I will return early to-morrow.'

'I may not be here to-morrow; stay by me now. I have something to tell you before death chokes my life out.'

CHAPTER LXXVI.

HUNTED DOWN AT LAST.

THAT eventful Sunday evening happened to be one (among many such) which the Dowager Clochnaben devoted to contradicting her son Lorimer. She had not had a favourable opportunity for contradicting him for a considerable period. He had been away at Vienna; and it is difficult to carry on arguments by letter if your correspondent obstinately omits all answer to the topic in dispute.

A Clochnaben 'dictum' that Heaven would probably visit the capital of Austria 'with fiery vials of wrath' on account of Strauss's waltzes being performed by military bands in the gardens there 'on the Lord's-day,' had always been passed over by him in his replies *sub silentio*, to her very great indignation; and she now recovered her opportunity for its discussion.

The occasion seemed certainly hard upon Lorimer, as the match which lit the gunpowder of her stored-away and slumbering wrath was a *cadeau* offered by himself; an almanac enamelled and encrusted with turquoise and garnets, in that style of Viennese workmanship in which the sinful admirers of Strauss and of military music so greatly excel.

'Humph!' said the Dowager, as she grimly planted the almanac on the chimney-piece, 'I see they mark the Sunday (in their absurd foreign lingo) in the list of days, just as if they kept it.'

'Well, they do keep it, in their own way.'

'Yes, so you told me, and a pretty way, too; banging drums, and playing on fifes and trombones and ophicleides, in the ears of all passers-by; and encouraging folk that ought to be hearing something very different, to dawdle up and down listening to their heathen clatter.'

'My dear mother, I'm sure I wish, if it could be more agreeable to you, that they played on shawms and dulcimers and timbrels—whatever timbrels may be.'

'That's right, Lorimer, make a sinful jest of it! Little *you* care for the desecration of the Lord's-day. I believe you actually prefer your wicked Continental Sabbaths to the decent Sabbaths of Scotland, which you were taught to reverence, so long as I nurtured you in the way of the Lord.'

'Well, I confess I feel very much weaned from that nurture, my dear mother. And having seen Sabbaths now, in Lisbon, Paris, Vienna, Florence, Naples, Marseilles, Milan, and a number of other towns, I must say for their wicked inhabitants, that in no single instance, either among a rough mercantile seafaring population; a simple and ignorant peasantry; or a luxurious and idle aristocracy, have I ever witnessed anything approaching, in the remotest degree, to the indecent desecration undergone by that day in your paradise of Sabbatarians,—my native Scotland.'

'Those that won't look certainly can't be expected to see'—retorted the Dowager, with a sniff of indignation; 'and it's my belief you'd say you saw nothing wrong if a fair or a cattle-show were held on the Sabbath-day, and a ball given in the evening.'

'You are mistaken, my dear mother. But I am not about to enter into "the vexed Bermoothes" of that whirlpool of argument as to how much, or how little, relaxation and recreation are permissible on Sundays. The Dervishes of the East believe they best pay respect to their Deity by the monotonous exercise of twirling round on one toe, or hanging by their elbows to a suspended staff, like flying-foxes and sleeping bats, or by the yet more passive service of letting their nails grow to a portentous length; and the Dervishes of the North may have their own notions of the extent of monotony agreeable to the Great Creator of infinite variety; to the God who sends millions on millions of men hourly into the world, no two of whom are so alike in understanding, aspect, voice, or bearing, but that their fellow creatures shall know them apart, and acknowledge a distinction and difference between them. I leave all that source of dispute, and I merely persist that the "Continental Sabbath," as you call it, is much more decently and inoffensively kept than the Scottish Sabbath.'

'The Scottish Sabbath is much obliged to you, I'm sure!'

'Well, you know, my dear mother, you yourself complain of the drunkenness, the vice, the pleasure-orgies, that go on even in your own neighbourhood there. Now I recommend you to make a little Continental tour; and in the leisurely hours you may spend in a Viennese or Italian promenade, consider these alternative propositions. Either the Scotch are so innately and incorrigibly corrupt that no amount of teaching and preaching can bring them to spend their time decently on that particular day; or, there is something radically wrong in the coercive rules you would lay down for their spending it. I am of the latter opinion.'

'Of course you are. We should spend our time in listening to

drums and fiddles, and chattering balderdash, instead of going to church, I suppose?’

‘No; but, in my opinion, it is the lack of any innocent and wholesome occupation or recreation that gives over the clay tenement containing a soul to the devil. “He findeth it swept and garnished,” and steps nimbly in, with the minor devils of sensuality and drunkenness at his heels. The Continental Sabbath is a day of prayer at intervals, from the early sunrise of matins to the taper-lit evening mass. But it is also a day of recreation; a day of enjoyment in the open air; a day when men and women are not expected to shut eyes and ears to all but a nasal monotone of appeal or thanksgiving for blessings apparently granted entirely in vain. And now let us have no more of this, for I must go out and leave you and the Austrian almanac to settle the matter between you. I promised to call on Lady Charlotte Skifton.’

‘And that Sabbath saint, Lady Ross, I presume?’

‘And on Gertrude Ross,’ answered Lorimer, in his sternest tone.

‘Well, then, you’ll find neither,’ retorted the Dowager, with a certain degree of triumph; ‘for I’ve just had a note from Lady Charlotte, and she’ll be here directly,—ready to whimper, I suppose, as usual—with the boy Neil, who says you promised him a dog on your return. As to his mother, she has wisely gone to see some beggar in a fever, and daren’t come back till she’s consulted a doctor about infection. I suppose you think *that* a fit employment for the Sabbath-day?’

‘Yes, I do; a very fit employment. “Whether is it better to do good or to do evil on the Sabbath-day?”—I lay no claim to originality in that last sentence.’

And a ‘grim smile’ curled round Lorimer Boyd’s mouth.

‘Oh! of course *you* approve. When people lose their characters, it’s a fine flourish to set up, going about doing good.’

Lorimer’s small stock of patience vanished in exasperation.

‘If,’ said he, bitterly, ‘she had joined that peculiar regiment of chete pleasure-seekers who deem themselves enrolled as God’s Own Dandies; with the Rhodopes, Messalinas, and Lesbians, who are the *rivandières* of their religious camp; and who, as soon as enlisted, think themselves better able to teach and preach than all the regular clergy of Great Britain,—you might say so, mother. But, so far as I have known, Gertrude Ross has done good without seeking the reward of human approval; without setting herself up as judge or instructress; or copying those wonderful professors of Christianity who are so struck and amazed at their own late conversion, that

they must needs pass it round, like the bottle after dinner,—ignorant or incredulous of the patent fact, that long before they ever read a line of Scripture, the persons they appeal to were already walking with God to the best of their ability.’

‘You needn’t be so violent,’ sneered his mother. ‘We all know you can’t endure a word that doesn’t worship Lady Ross.’

‘I can’t endure hypocrisy, wherever I find it, either in man or woman. I hate to see persons who are unfit to teach, teaching. I hate to see men who have lived base lives, *kotooed* to, listened to, perhaps publicly thanked, when they ought to be degraded and forgotten; I hate to watch the vain struggle of the innocent to be justified; or the successful effort of the deceiver to be set on high. I consider such reversal of God’s clear justice to be the true translation of “taking His name in vain.” I hate——’

But what more Lorimer meant to denounce—while his mother angrily watched his fierce intellectual countenance, ready with a keenly-sharpened answer as soon as his voice should pause—cannot be known; for at this juncture in came Lady Charlotte, ‘ready to whimper,’ as prophesied by her scornful relative, and Neil, who threw back his eager head in Lorimer’s warm embrace, and said, laughingly,—

‘I’m come with Mamma Charlotte, entirely out of avarice and self-interest. Where’s my dog?’

‘Here,’ said Lorimer, with a smile so sweet and kindly that it scarcely seemed the face of the same man who had just been speaking. ‘Here! and a smart little fellow he is, with your name as owner already engraved on his collar. You must train him to English, for he is only used to German: and don’t begin by delivering him over to some groom to clip his ears and tail, as if, among other improvements of the works of creation, God didn’t know how to make a terrier. And now where is your dear mother?’

Neil lifted his rosy mouth from the passionate kiss of welcome he was imprinting on the terrier’s forehead, and said, ‘She’s gone to see a poor man who is ill.’

‘But where is the poor man?’

‘Ah—here’s the address,’ and Neil dived into his pocket, and pulled out with sundry other small articles a somewhat battered memorandum-book, which he presented to Lorimer with one hand, while still caressing the dog with the other.

Lorimer took his hat.

‘Where are you going now?’ said Lady Clochnaben. ‘Lady Ross is not returned.’

'I'm going to break the Lord's-day by looking after that beggar,' said her son, as he closed the door and disappeared.

A thrill of something as like alarm and concern as her nature permitted ran through the iron bosom of the grim Dowager. She had been listening to Lady Charlotte's querulous terrors during the presentation of the dog to his young master, and felt the truth of her whimpering cousin's observations, that '*It must be something very particularly dreadful, or Gertie would not stay the night away from home.*'

'Run after him,' she said to Neil,—'but no; it is of no use to ask him to stay for *my* behest. Fair faces are the devil's best tools. And your daughter's one of them,' added she, turning suddenly and with exceeding fierce ass to poor Lady Charlotte; whose whimpering thereupon broke into sobs.

While they argued, Lorimer stalked forth, and, taking the first cab he could meet with, drove rapidly to the obscure lodgings of the old Scotchwoman.

Many and many a year afterwards he still saw vividly, as he saw it then, the scene which presented itself to his eyes.

There was more light in the small room than ever had lit the humble apartment before, each of the hurried visitants having merely set down the candle furnished to them. The doctor was there, and Gertrude, and that Creole wife, unknown by sight to Lorimer; the terrified old Scotchwoman; and the 'neighbour' who had done the office of a servant in attending to the house-door, and who now following Lorimer with another light, had left that and the room-door alike open.

That he had come during the last gasp of a horrible death-scene was Lorimer's instant impression. Gertrude was kneeling by the blind-looking, purple, bloated object, stretched panting on the bed. The Creole was standing near her, weeping, her face hid in her hands. The doctor and those others present, all gazing with fixed yet shrinking scrutiny on the dying man; the light falling full upon him and them, though flickering, torch-like, in the draught of air from the narrow staircase.

As Lorimer moved with an exclamation of painful anxiety towards Gertrude, another group appeared at the gaping doorway.

Allie was there, with two policemen!

Her little hands were lifted and clenched in front of her slender person, like two little claws ready to pounce. There was no more escape for James Frere. The thirst of vengeance could now be quenched by a long satisfying draught. He was hunted down at last!

She stood for a moment as if scarcely understanding the reality of what was passing ; those little feline hands still suspended in their odd attitude of seizure, with her eyes glitteringly fixed on the Creole.

‘Take him !’ at last she said, in a sharp short whisper. ‘Take him !’ and she turned her head to the men behind her.

Lorimer Boyd, roused by the words and the movement, looked up, looked towards her, while the group round the bed remained absorbed in the agony before them.

‘Wretched woman,’ said he, ‘the man is *dead* whom you would have trapped and taken.’

DEAD !

James Frere had escaped her after all.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

RETRIBUTION.

As Ailie turned, and fled with a hoarse cry from the death-chamber, Gertrude rose slowly to her feet, and looked round as in a trance. A wild, unnatural, ecstatic smile was on her face. It changed a little, a certain degree of consciousness was in it, as she espied Lorimer.

She moved towards him with an effort like one who walks in sleep.

‘Look !’ she said in an odd whisper, as strange as her countenance, ‘look !’ and she held up a roll of battered and crushed papers, gravel-stained and torn.

The picture of Gertrude standing thus, in the wavering light that beat to and fro as if it had something of the triumph of life in it, never left Lorimer’s memory ; nor the strange effect of the same flickering and moving radiance passing over the deathly stillness of the bed ; over the dark-shadowed eyes of the dead man, his bald discoloured shaven skull, and his thin knuckles clenched outside the sheets, with their deep indented scar more visible than ever on that white background.

He seized Gertrude’s hands with a trembling grasp. ‘Come away ; oh ! come away from this place,’ he said.

‘You should all go—go immediately,’ said the doctor, as he gently and pityingly touched the sobbing Creole’s shoulder. ‘This man has died of the worst species of typhus ; the “black fever”

of the books. Leave the window wide open, and go, all of you, go ! It is the strangest case I ever assisted at.'

In a minute or two more, all was hushed and darkened there ; and the corpse of James Frere was left alone.

Lorimer led Gertrude forth. She neither wept, nor fainted, nor trembled—but once, when in his agony of anxiety he pressed her hands tightly in his own, she murmured—' Oh ! I hope I shall not wake, and find it all a dream ! '

Then, by degrees, the state of stupefaction seemed to melt away ; she looked round at the room in the hotel where he was staying, into which he had brought her—thanked him—said ' it was right not to take her to Neil,'—and in the effort to conclude the sentence, ' It would be such bad news for Douglas if our boy was ill,'—the dark clouds of oppressive thought clashed together, and a shower of tears at once relieved and exhausted her !

Lorimer never spoke. He sat silently by ; his arms folded tight across his broad chest, as if in resolute effort to avoid any ill-judged impulse to console, or check that convulsive fit of weeping.

She was the first to speak. She stretched her hand across, and laid it gently on his arm.

' I have got **THAT LETTER** ! ' she said, with white trembling lips. ' I have recovered the letters they stole from me, to persuade Douglas I was false.'

Then she told him all ; as she herself had learnt it from the wretched being whose strange and erring life had just ended. He had admitted every particular that Lorimer had already heard respecting his career, to be true. He claimed to be Clochnaben's son when a young man carrying on a most dissipated career at college. Not that he had ever seen him as a child, or knew it till his mother's death, who had then assured him of it, and put into his hands Clochnaben's letters in those early days, full of protestations of everlasting attachment, and proving that her sole means of subsistence was an income received from her seducer.

Unaware of the sort of man with whom he had to deal, and not yet experienced in the world, he had rashly brought these letters and proofs to Clochnaben himself, with an appeal for support and fatherly protection. Clochnaben gave him fair words and precious promises, affecting to be much touched at re-perusing his own old love-letters,—got them into his possession by giving Frere a sum of money in exchange ; and from the hour he had so deprived him of all means of corroborating the scandal, as he termed it, of his connexion with Frere's mother ;—utterly denied that any such inti-

macy had ever existed,—and declared it was the invention of the young adventurer, whose career he nevertheless at first attempted to arrange, by procuring foreign mercantile employment, and so getting rid of him.

It was years since he had received assistance from Richard Clochnaben, when he presented himself with the false and specious tale Gertrude might remember, at Clochnaben Castle. He had then escaped from gaol instead of a Roman Catholic seminary. Nothing was true except his privations, which had been very real. He brought with him two or three letters supposed to have been found among his mother's things *after* the major portion of the correspondence had been bought by Clochnaben. The latter instantly taxed him with the forgery; pointed out that he had not been at that time in England, nor at any place from whence they were dated; and declared that on the smallest further attempt to establish such relations between himself and Frere, he would deliver him to justice, 'and see him swing with satisfaction.' Notwithstanding which declaration, and the rage he had shown at the odd accident of invitation to supersede Heaton which had made Frere an inmate under the same roof, he had supplied him with a sum of money to facilitate his escape at the time the detective had come to Glenrossie, taking a dreadful oath never to repeat such assistance if he dared to return to Great Britain.

Frere had never since received one farthing of help, and had continued to 'live by his wits;' having drained every sixpence he could, from the infatuated Alice Ross.

'Hunted down at last' by that unexpected avenger, he had sought in vain an obscure asylum in the disguise of a travelling artist. Afraid of the police, who came suddenly upon him in a tavern while consulting with one of his former felon companions whom they were seeking, he had made one of his narrowest escapes by threading unusual streets and bye-lanes, and coming out at last on a narrow canal that ran by the suburbs. There he hastily hailed a barge that was slowly making its way past him, and giving a couple of shillings to the man in charge, asked for a passage, saying that he had been walking all the morning, and was footsore and fatigued. He lay down under shelter of some tarpaulin, and felt nearly suffocated by the strange and disagreeable odour of the cargo in the barge. He sat up and looked into the water, which appeared to him dazzling with beautiful colours; he became perfectly giddy and insensible, and, on attempting to stand up, lost his balance, and fell over the unprotected ledge of the barge into the canal. He was assisted out, put

into a cab, and was quite sensible enough after the immersion to give his address, and not sorry to have an excuse in his landlady's eyes for remaining in bed and in hiding. The dreadful smell, however, haunted him, and he was unable to eat anything either that day or the next. His eyes then became affected; small bladders of blood seemed to fill and weigh down the lids, and within a very brief period from the sending for Lady Ross, whom he recognised, he became blind, and the eyes presented a most dreadful appearance—blood-shot, blank, and staring. He told Gertrude he was certain he was dying from the inhalation of poisonous vapours on the barge; that his blindness was a judgment on him; confessed all, and referred her for a portfolio of papers to the Creole, whose address he gave.

She had listened at first incredulously to Gertrude's story, and seemed to think it some new attempt to entrap Frere, but at length proposed to accompany Lady Ross, carrying the portfolio with her. From the mass of papers, drawings and plans, which he had feared to take when he fled from the vicinity of Manchester Square, he gave a packet, in which was the letter to Kenneth in the condition in which it had been originally found. He said that more than once lately he had considered whether he would not propose to *sell* it to Lorimer Boyd, or to Lady Ross herself, but was deterred by the fear of being given into custody; and that he was still casting about whom he could employ to transact that business when he was stricken by his strange malady. By the time his broken confession was over, and the doctor's examination made, he was insensible and dying; his body covered with suffused spots, his eyes a blank jelly-like mass.

The doctor had been of opinion that he died, as he had said, from inhaling poison, and that the poison was refuse matter from some gasworks on the bank of the canal.

He did not anticipate any fatal effects to those who had assisted the man in his horrible illness, as it arose from such peculiar causes; but they should be careful for some days.

And so ended Gertrude's agitated narration; and at the close she lifted her weary, hopeful, lovely eyes to Lorimer, questioning both by words and looks how to get all this disclosed to Sir Douglas.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

INVALIDED HOME.

WHEN Lorimer had to make an avowal on his part, of being in possession of news painfully interesting to Gertrude.

Sir Douglas was ill; very ill: any very sudden agitation might be fatal to him: he was in fact invalided home; and Lorimer had already resolved to go out to him, and had written to try and secure the services of Giuseppe as an excellent sick nurse and attendant, and who on his return might be of use to Kenneth, of whose bodily condition late accounts had been unfavourable. Gertrude must put her patient trust in God as hitherto; and believe,—as Lorimer believed,—that she would receive her reward, even in this world, for all the faithful uncomplaining tenderness with which she had borne her hard lot as respected her husband.

So Lorimer departed! And after her few days' anxious quarantine, Gertrude dwelt once more with her mother and her beloved Neil, and waited news from the Crimea.

Is it forgotten? Is it faded to a sad dream, except with those who actually took part in it, that war, waged with disaster as much as with the armed foe? That war in which, to the eternal glory of English courage, the heroism of endurance was proved equal to the heroism of action; when youths and men and aged warriors, alike showed their willingness not only to die fighting for their country, but to die miserably, tediously, obscurely, for their country,—without either murmur or appeal. When beardless boys, taken from luxurious homes, served in the trenches and camped in wreaths of snow, and bore the awful change with eager gallantry; till mothers made childless knew when the tidings reached them, that those they had so fondly cradled and so tenderly reared, had perished,—*killed* but not *conquered*, by the lingering and persistent hardships which had surrounded them.

Are the names *but* names now, of strange far-away places, known to us only by maps and sketches, where the best blood of England reddened the streams, or sank in the alien earth? Are they vanished like the thirst that was quenched in the Bulganac river, after a burning and weary march, prelude to the war of the morrow: when men stood gazing, from the rugged and precipitous heights which crowned that river's banks, on the roots of willows mowed down in

a bitter harvest to prevent shelter or concealment of a foe ; and three hundred yards of fire blazed in the distance, from the quiet village of Bouliok ?

Is Alma but a vague melodious sound ? where fording that unknown water, and marching straight into batteries held to be impregnable, we drove out five-and-forty thousand men before the sun marked three hours of time for the struggle ? Do we still shudder at the tale of ever-memorable Balaklava ; when, circled by a blaze of artillery, front, flank, and rear, our gallant horsemen rode to death at the word of a mistaken command, and left on the ground two-thirds of their number ? Do the dull November mists of morning never bring to mind the fogs of that miserable anxious dawn at Inkermann ; when those who had worked in the trenches all night were suddenly called forth from their comfortless rest in tents or on the bare ground, to charge against barbaric foes ; foes who mutilated the dead to avenge the bravery of the living ?

Are our dreaming ears never haunted by floating watchwords through the night ? brief sad sentences spoken by dying lips, whose farewells were given so far away ?

‘ Forward, 23d ! ’ shouts one young voice.—‘ Stand firm, for the honour of England and the credit of the Rifles ; firm, my men ! ’ cries another.—‘ I will fight to the last,’ pants the brave but overpowered swordsman called upon to surrender as prisoner.—‘ I do not move till the battle is won,’ exclaims the crippled hero who lay bleeding before Sebastopol, amongst guns still directed by him against the enemy !

Do we think, as our daily post comes happily in, or as we ourselves carelessly sit down at our writing-tables for an uneventful correspondence, of that charnel-house at Varna, and all the ‘ last messages ’ written by deputy for poor soldiers at Scutari, and on board the swarming troop-ships, and in the miserable hospitals denuded of stores or fit appliances for the wounded ? Do the stray scattered sentences return, recorded among a thousand others ? when one writes, ‘ Praying my mother may not feel the misfortune of my death too much ; ’ and another—‘ Write to my father ; he will best break this to my wife ; ’ while a third indites the triumphant date, ‘ Written on the field we have taken from the enemy.’

Do we yet mourn for the later, nearer deaths of those who came back to native land and pleasant homes ; whose faces were once more dwelt on by loving tender eyes ; whose hands were once more clasped by loving hands ; but who were so worn and shaken by the past tempest of that wintry war, that, like nipped trees, they stood for a little while, and then succumbed and fell ? Those who have

not survived to win their laurels in future battles, but rest under the

‘Cypress and yew,—sorrowful trees!’

of their own green land,—soldiers who died in time of peace, when the bitterness of death seemed ended; precious lives, whose loss left blanks in many a home, that never, never, can be filled!

Do we sometimes see a vision, as we cross on a sunny morning from the gardens opposite Buckingham Palace and the Horse Guards, of the crowded Park as it was on that thrilling day, when such of our wounded heroes as had returned, passed before their Queen in thin lines,—receiving a medal and a word, for the life that was risked, and the health or the limb for ever lost,—and loyally saluting, amid the cheers of the crowd, the Ruler of the country in whose service they had bled?

Events follow events in this busy world of ours, as wave follows wave on the wide and restless sea,—too happy if they do not pass like those waves, leaving only, here and there, a narrow heap of weed thrown up on the shore, where the landmarks of history stand.

How much is remembered, and how much forgotten,—how many are rewarded, and how many suffered to float away into oblivion and neglect,—is best known to those who should receive, and those who could bestow, the prizes that glitter in the eyes of the lovers of glory; and which should also be the recompense of all who fight and suffer, even though some be willing to suffer without such reward, for duty and conscience’ sake alone.

Sir Douglas was not among those who could claim the meed of fame that day. He had served his country well in many a past campaign, but the dreary hour had come to him, as to many another gallant heart, when he was compelled to own that the body could no longer obey the soul’s behest; any more than the soldier, bleeding faintly to death on the battle-field, can rise at the sound of the bugle-call, and march with his comrades to victory.

In bed, or in a blanket on the ground in his tent; on board a crowded steamer borne to an hotel at Pera; looking forward at one time only to a grave at Scutari; rallying a little, and struggling so far with sickness as again to engage with the enemy, only again to be disabled, not by wounds, but by sickness; depressed, worn out, exhausted, and miserable at the helplessness consequent on this condition, Sir Douglas Ross had at last to surrender to the force of circumstances, and confess himself a dying invalid.

His letter to Lorimer was the letter of a broken-hearted man; and he proved his consciousness of that fact by its closing words: ‘I am not the only officer in command here, whose fate it will be to

die, not of the privations of the camp or the wounds received in battle, but of a broken heart.'

And Lorimer knew that only the extreme of fading and failing weakness would have wrung that sentence from his friend and comrade; dear to him from boyhood till the present hour.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

PEACE IN GLENROSSIE.

THE summer days wore on. Sir Douglas had embarked, and was on his way home! So much at least was known to Gertrude's restless heart. That strange and dreadful life, so busy round him; of alternate wet and cold and heat; of toil to procure water or proper food; of roads impassable, and insufficient clothing; of wounds and cholera and exhaustion; of trenches and pickets; of overloaded troop-ships, and miserable moving of dying men on mules and rough contrivances of planks; decimated companies, and needless sacrifice by neglect and mismanagement of lives that might have been spared—all that was over! But the mortification of inaction, and the private sorrow of heart: these things remained, ever present with him; and at first his state of debility was such, that the faithful friend who had joined and now accompanied him, daily expected the bitter task of writing home to say that 'all was ended,' and that the gallant spirit had passed away from earthly struggles to the long peace of death.

A better fate was in store for him. As they neared England his health improved, and when at length Lorimer Boyd announced their landing at Folkestone, he was also able to add that he hoped, before leaving that port, to break to him all that had occurred since the day that Gertrude had been called to Frere's strange and dreadful sick bed, and in obeying that call had indeed gained the 'special blessing' which her young son believed would descend on her head!

Once again he wrote from the hotel at Folkestone. Sir Douglas had such an access of despondency on finding himself once more in that saddened England which he had quitted under such grievous circumstances, that he had been confined to his room with low fever. Lorimer owned that at last he risked the shock of a more abrupt communication than he had originally intended, 'lest our Douglas should die, and never know the truth on this side of the grave!'

All had now been told him; the papers given by Gertrude were in his possession, and had been read and re-read with many a bitter groan of vehement self-reproach. He sought no excuse in the chain of circumstances that had led him to deem her false, whose truth had been so dearly proved: though he spoke sorrowfully of the constant concealment of facts which, clearly explained and understood, would have seemed harmless and innocent as they were in reality. He spoke also of the suffering he had endured at times from flashes of torturing doubt, repelled with all the strength of his heart, but recurring at wretched intervals, as on the day when he heard Kenneth so passionately speaking with Gertrude in the morning-room, and found her agitated beyond what a common sympathy in his supposed domestic troubles could reasonably justify. And, lastly, he revealed to Lorimer—with injunctions never while he lived to breathe that secret to mortal ear—the events of that fearful morning when Kenneth, delirious from drunken excess, had attempted his uncle's life, accompanying that murderous assault with the wild speech:—‘Part from her yourself; part from her for ever! And be sure if *I* do not marry your widow, no other man shall!’

The narrow escape from death which the unsteadiness of the drunkard's aim had then permitted; the pain and misery of mind Sir Douglas had undergone, sitting with his bandaged hand throbbing with pain, listening to the treacherous tale of Alice Ross, and reading, as he thought—as any one would have thought—the certain, incontrovertible proof that Gertrude was on the eve of a sinful yielding to the passion so wildly and daringly expressed for her, not only to herself but to her husband; the pining for her, the haunting of all memories of her, in spite of these convictions; the yearning for death on the battle-field, and the slow, ignoble, sickly wasting away of life that came instead; the agony of perplexity caused by Neil's innocent boyish letters about his mother, and Kenneth, and his young cousin Effie; the longing he had had to countermand his own strict and solemn injunctions to Lorimer, and entreat for news of Gertrude, of home, of the treasures he had lost and abjured in vain;—all this did Sir Douglas acknowledge with an out-pouring of the heart that left no thought unknown to the faithful friend who now soothed, and nursed, and consoled him, with assurances of the patient love and lingering hope that had upborne his innocent wife through all the bitter misunderstanding that had parted them.

‘I knew this happier day would come,’ Lorimer wrote to her. ‘I was a true prophet of good; and I think in the depths of your heart you also looked for it sooner or later. Now let me beseech you to try and be as calm and well as possible; and expect Douglas

back at Glenrossie with what haste I can permit him to make, being, as I am at present, a combination of sick-nurse and commander-in-chief.

‘You must expect to see him altered, dear Gertrude; he is very *much* altered: very much more deserving of that title of ‘Old Sir Douglas,’ which it once so surprised you he should have obtained. But happiness is a great restorer, and I trust you have both many, many years of such happiness in store.—Yours ever, LORIMER.’

The very sentence thus worded to reassure Gertrude, filled her with that trembling anxiety which comes to those who love, like an extra sense.

If he should yet be taken from her! If he should die before he could reach Glenrossie! If she herself should fail, and faint, and perish before she could once more be folded in his embrace! Before she could speak words of love, and welcome, and pity, and see him stand on his own threshold-stone, by the side of her Neil, as on that fatal morning when she looked back at them from the carriage-window as she left for Edinburgh, not knowing that look was to be her last! If, after all, they never should meet again on earth, after all her hopes and her triumphant justification!

Feverish was the life that Gertrude led during these days of helpless expectation. All the care of her which poor Lady Charlotte attempted to take seemed utterly in vain. Eating, sleeping, sitting still for more than a few minutes at a time, were all alike impossible. Yet she obeyed Lorimer’s counsel. He had adjured her not to attempt to join them, even should Sir Douglas be delayed on the road by any relapse or variation in health,—at all events, not to come unless sent for. In the tranquillity of his own home, let the broken soldier recover the agitation which must naturally follow such a meeting as they looked forward to.

She obeyed. She was patient. The day at length dawned, which should give its sunset light to their re-union. She read again and again the sweet brief line in her husband’s own handwriting,—‘my Gertrude, I am coming home to be forgiven.’

‘*Forgiven!* Oh, love! oh, husband! oh, Douglas!’ Scarcely could she refrain from such audible exclamations as broke the miserable meditations of her sleepless nights, when in her former grief she thought of him afar off, soothed by the songs of a stranger’s voice.

The day wore on; the sound of wheels rapidly approaching was heard in the avenue. Louder and nearer it came; louder and nearer still; till it suddenly ceased,—and the master of Glenrossie Castle stood once more at the portal of his forsaken home.

'My wife;' was all Sir Douglas said. Lorimer Boyd had stepped aside as they left the carriage, and caught young Neil to his breast. The aged butler stood trembling and tearful as his master earned a moment for support on his arm, and then passed feebly in; while Gertrude, with a mixture of tenderness, suffering, and triumph in her face, such as beams from the countenance of the wife in Millais' unequalled picture of 'The Release,' folded her arms round the stately form whose head bent low as if unworthy of her embrace, and sobbed aloud for very excess of joy.

Nothing could part them now: nothing but death. The long weary grief was over: the lesson of patience ended. There was peace at last in Glenrossie!

What would my readers have more? the rest of my tale is briefly told, or may be briefly guessed.

The sorrowful approach of Kenneth the day after his uncle's arrival: humbling himself to the dust before the kindly pitying generous eyes that filled with tears as he bade him welcome.

The triumph of Lady Charlotte, and the frolic of her curl, as she boasted of the justice done at last to her Gertie by the impetuous Sir Douglas, who, 'however superior he might be thought by strangers, had owned himself entirely in the wrong.' The iron spite of the Dowager Clochnaben, who resolutely crushed the tender little woman's joy; assuring her that the *WORLD* merely saw the yielding of a 'silly auld carle' in Sir Douglas's misplaced indulgence, 'after all that had happened, you know;' and that as to Kenneth, 'other folk might call it penitence if they pleased, but *she* called it softening of the brain.'

The wondering gladness of Maggie, when the light broke in upon her that her slender Effie would one day hold her place at 'the Castle' as the bride of young Neil, and so melt Torrieburn and Glenrossie into one glad home. And last, not least, the rest of heart that came to Lorimer, lonely though many of his days might be; looking back to the long, long friendship which had ever found him leal and true; from the boyish days at Eton, till the passions and anxieties of after years had faded away like a dream, and he sat by the winter fire and discussed the hopes and fears of a new generation at Glenrossie, with Old Sir Douglas, and his gentle, faithful wife.

Ailie had disappeared. There was indeed a rumour sent abroad in the narrow circles of Torrieburn and Glenrossie, that far North, in one of the bye-streets of the ancient city of Aberdeen, a spare and slender female lived, who answered her description; and whose occupation it was to prepare and execute baskets and nets and mats in glossy coloured chenilles.

Soft chenille, that lightly covered the sharp wires beneath ; so that when worn and old and broken, the faded trifles,—ragged and crooked and witch-like,—tore the inexperienced hand that fain would bend them back into shape.

These, in their first freshness, she brought to the various hotels where visitors and sportsmen ‘put up,’ on their tour far North : and they were sold as the work of ‘a decent bodie who had seen better days.’ Furtively, in the dim foggy autumn evenings, that unknown lady made her rounds ; scudding swiftly, creeping softly, gazing warily, avoiding all greeting or recognition, gliding round the dark corners from the better streets to her forlorn garret in a grim and grey stone house, five stories high, with little solid windows black with age. She had told the sharp slatternly landlady, she ‘could not pay a heavy rent,’ and she ‘liked a high room :’ she had been ‘used *all her life* to a very lofty room, though small.’ All her life !

The high stone staircase, greasy with filth, seemed indeed no fatigue to that spare figure. Swiftly she passed upward ; so swiftly that the long ends of the shabby fur boa she wore round her throat, waved in the air as if it had life : and only sometimes, if she heard voices, or saw some unusual glimmering light on the flats beneath her own as she ascended, she would pause, and peer with half-closed gleaming eyes ; swiftly vanishing out of sight if a door opened, or a foot-fall sounded on those echoing steps of rough-hewn granite.

Never was her own door open : never but by one rare chance, when she had gone out more hurriedly than usual with her chenille-work, because a Royal Princess was passing through the city of Aberdeen.

On that one rare occasion, a little meagre girl, tempted by curiosity, and the vista through the portal of those glossy, soft, bright-coloured materials, with their shining wire frameworks glancing in the light,—stole in and stood by the table, absorbed in a mystery of admiration and contemplation. She never intruded again ! That spare grim lady softly returned ; gripped her suddenly by her bony little shoulders, and shook and ‘worretted’ her as a cat might shake a mouse. She dared not eat her. The ‘neighbour’ whose child she was might have hauled the cat-like lady to a police-office. She ‘only shook her.’ Shook her in a fit of fierce suspicion that the half-starved creature was trying to learn how to make those wire baskets and sheathe their clay-like feet in velvet chenille, in order to rival or undersell their present creator.

But that shaking checked all curiosity for a long time to come, in the terrified little victim,—causing her to sit stunned and stupefied on the topmost step of the stone staircase, though in close vicinity

to the awful door,—unable to recover from her giddiness sufficiently to take refuge in the flat below ; where she dwelt, in careless squalor, with her bony little sisters and brothers.

Ah ! how different was the lone garret in that stony house, from the bright morning-room at Glenrossie !

There once more, in the glowing light of reconciled love, and the glorious autumn sunshine, sat Sir Douglas and his happy wife, talking of the past and future, with voices full of gladness and eyes serene with peace.

Only now and then, with a sigh of fond regret, Sir Douglas would lament the ‘two years of waning life wasted in distrust.’ And Gertrude, with her low voice full of all the music of tenderness, would answer that self-reproachful speech with its counterpart : ‘I ought to have told you all at first ; I ought to have told you !’ and echo back his sigh.

Once only she saw her vile and treacherous sister-in-law again. Once, when Sir Douglas and she were on their way to some pleasant visit near Inverness, and during their halt in Aberdeen, had taken a stroll in the outskirts of the town, near the sea.

There, in the grey evening, a spare figure stood motionless, gazing out on the dim colourless ocean : then, waving its hands a moment as in some aching despair, it disappeared in the distance.

‘What startled you, Gertrude?’ said Sir Douglas, as he drew her arm closer within his own.

‘I thought I saw Ailie!’ she answered quickly ; and clung to that dear protecting arm ; ‘I thought I saw Ailie looking out over the sea !’

Was it then indeed Ailie who dwelt in the grey and dank stone house, in that dull bye-street of Aberdeen ?

Was it Ailie who stood in that misty evening light, despairing ?

Thinking of the awful day when the smuggler was murdered,—or the day when Frere was hunted down at last,—or the love-days begun in the halls of Clochnaben, which had ended in such bitter vengeance ?—or that hour of peaceful sun on the fair mountain side, when she spoke of ‘kith-and-kin here’ to her betrayed half-brother ; while the mavis sang, and the harebell waved in the gentle breeze, and he vowed to befriend and protect her ?

Alone now. Alone for ever !

